

Title: Shoshur Bari

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Level: Intermediate to Upper Intermediate

Genre: Fiction (Family Relationships, Marriage, Special Occasions)

Adapted and edited with the author's permission by Cherie Brown. Photos by Kanita Ridwana, Mumtaz Jahan Chowdhury and Nuzhat Rommana Chowdhury.

Shajjad Shaheb tries to **hide** his deep **sad sigh*** from his wife *Nazma*, to whom he has been married for almost a quarter of a **century**. There is no reason to remain sad on this, the happiest day of the year. This is the morning of *Eid-ul-Fitr*, the early part of *Eid* day, which is one of the largest Muslim *festivals** in the world. Today should be a day for joy.

Shajjad Shaheb had to get up earlier than usual and take a long **shower**, then put on new *Panjabi pyjamas** in preparation to go to *Eid gaaah* to take part in the special *Eid namaz*. Now, he can hear the voice of the *muezzin* calling people to attend the special *namaz* of *Eid*. The first *jamat* will start at seven o'clock in the morning, so really he needs to **hurry** to be there in time before the crowds become heavy. Otherwise, he will not get a good place for *namaz*.

He tries his best to show his usual *festive mood**, but with each passing moment, the smiling face of his oldest child - his only daughter - comes back into his mind. *Toma*, who holds the most **precious** place in his heart, was married to *Sohel*, his new son-in-law, a few months ago. Now *Toma* is living with her in-laws in their family home, and this year she is spending the first *Eid* after her marriage at her *shoshur bari* with her new husband and his family in their *hometown** of Sylhet.

This is the first time ever *Sajjad Shaheb* has spent *Eid* without *Toma* since the little girl was born to them. He cannot remember ever spending any *Eid* without his lovely favourite child. He thinks back to the day *Toma* was born and how **excited** he was to see his new little one. He had waited, with so much excitement, with a group of relatives, outside the **delivery** room at the **hospital**, to see the face of his new little daughter. How excited he had been to see his new **baby** girl. He remembers how openly **relieved** some of his relatives had been, saying how fortunate it was that the little girl did not have the dark **skin** of her mother. But *Sajjad Shaheb* did not care about that. He did not think it was right to place value on his little girl because of the colour of her skin. Instead, there was a strange new feeling within him - a feeling which was beyond his ability to express. He was a father at last, and there was nothing more precious to him in the whole world than his **healthy** new baby daughter.



Photo: Mumtaz Jahan Chowdhury

Now, years later, *Sajjad shaheb* still feels the same strange feeling for his “little” girl, even though she is all grown up. There is a **hole** in his heart because she is no longer with him on this special day. He wants to see his daughter so much, but the reality is that *Toma* is married now. He has to accept the reality that from now on *Toma* will be spending her *Eid* day with her husband in her *soshur bari*. Of course, she will still come to visit them, but now her address has changed. He thinks it is hard for a father to accept this change. Of course *Sajjad Shaheb* completely understands that *Toma* must be very happy and excited to spend the very first *Eid* of her newly married life with her new husband and her new family, but the feelings *Sajjad Shaheb* has as a father, and the fact that it is a special day, make him feel very sad. Silently, he is missing his dear daughter so much.

He remembers that sometimes he went **abroad** for work in the month of *Ramadan*, but he always tried to plan his trips away in such a way that he could come back just before *Eid* day to spend this special day with his family, in particular with his only much-loved daughter. She is his favourite child.

“How can I spend this *Eid* without my daughter?”, he asks himself. His happiness, his *Eid*, does not feel complete without her presence. But he does not want to show his sad face to other family members and **spoil** their day, so he tries to look as happy as possible, just as usually he does on other *Eid* days.

At this moment *Nazma*, his wife, as is usual at this time of the year, is very **busy** making a special **breakfast** for *Eid* day. She can hardly find any time to talk to *Sajjad Shaheb* at this busy morning time. *Sajjad Shaheb* goes to bathe before going to *Eid namaz* and puts on his new *Panjabi* pyjamas, but before starting for *namaz* he realizes cannot find where he has put his *tupi*. Where on earth can it be? He looks everywhere, but he cannot find it at all. Oh no!

Every *Eid*, at this time of the day when *Nazma* was busy with **kitchen** work, it was *Toma* who would put out his *Panjabi*, *jainamaj* and the other things he needed for the day. This had been the usual custom of father and daughter for many years while *Nazma* was busy preparing her sons for *namaz*. This year, he has to get everything ready by himself. *Sajjad Shaheb* deeply misses *Toma* and cannot help himself. He has to call *Toma* over the **phone**. What is his little girl doing all alone in her *shoshur bari* with all those new people in her new home? He **picks up** the phone and calls *Toma*, but it is *Sohel* who answers. He tells *Sajjad Shaheb* to hold on as *Toma* is busy right at that moment. *Sajjad Shaheb* waits for *Toma* to pick up the phone. At last, when *Toma* comes to the phone *Sajjad Shaheb* sounds excited. "What are you doing, *maa*?"

Toma is very busy this morning. She has so many things to do. She is in the middle of **ironing** *Sohel's Panjabi* which he needs to wear at *Eid namaz*. "*Eid Mubarak Baba*", she says, "Is there any particular reason for which you called me now? I'm busy. I'll call you a little later. I have to finish ironing *Sohel's Panjabi* for him to wear to *Eid namaz*." She **pauses**, "Do you know *Baba*, I have also prepared *jorda*, and *firni*, and *shemai* for breakfast today?". She wants him to know just how much she has had to do.



Photo: Kanita Ridwana

Sajjad Shaheb is surprised to hear that his little girl is ironing her husband's *Panjabi*, and has to **cook** all these different kinds of food for the whole family. How can his little one **manage** to do all these things? "Ahh, she has really grown up at last", he thinks. Of course when *Toma* was living in his house, she did some occasional cooking, but never all these things together at the same time. "What will happen if she does something wrong, and her new family complains and tells her off? Uff!" *Sajjad Shaheb* feels helpless. He is miles away from his precious daughter. His heart **aches** and he wishes that he could help this special daughter who is like a part of his own heart. He cannot **imagine** how hard it might be if her in-laws **treated** her unfairly.

Of course *Sajjad Shaheb* had tried to find out about as much as he could about the **groom** and his family members before they got married, but in the end, what they are really like, only Allah knows. All these thoughts and possibilities make him **worry**, and make him feel worse. It seems to him that his heart now belongs to others and he has to depend totally on their goodness and will. How hard this is to bear.

Soon, he goes to the *mosque** with two of his sons for *Eid namaz*. As they leave for the mosque, again they all say how much they miss *Toma*, because in the past, whenever they left the house for *Eid namaz*, *Toma* brought "*atr*" for them with which they would **scant** themselves. This year, *Sajjad Shaheb* has to put *atron* himself and the *panjabi* of his two sons. The fact that *Toma* is not here makes it feel as if something is missing from the day.



Photo: Nuzhat Rommana Chowdhury

After *namaz* they do *kolakuli* with others and say, “*Eid Mubarak*”. At last, they return home, where a special *Eid* breakfast is waiting for them. The table is full of various types of wonderful food, but today the *porata*, *beef* vuna*, and *khichuri*, which is *Toma*’s favorite, does not **taste** as good to him. Even the *carrot* halowa* tastes less sweet. “What is my daughter having for breakfast today?”, the father thinks. In his mind, he tries to see the scene, comforting himself by thinking that *Toma* is also having a great breakfast with her new family members, her *shoshur shasuri*, in her new home.

After having his breakfast, *Sajjad Shaheb* goes to the *verandah** with a **cup of tea** in hand. *Nazma* is sitting and waiting for him with her own cup of tea. As *Sajjad Shaheb* enters silently, *Nazma* doesn't notice him. Her eyes are filled with tears as she too thinks of their only daughter. **Suddenly**, she sees her husband, and tries to hide her tears, but she soon realises that *Sajjad Shaheb* is also thinking of their daughter too, and her tears flow freely.

Nazma’s voice breaks, “How is our little one spending *Eid* in her *Shoshur Bari*?”, she asks her husband. “She’s there with new people. What will happen if she finds it difficult to get used to it all?”

Shajjad Shaheb tries his best to **comfort** her and hide his own worries and says, “Calm down *Nazma*, don’t worry at all. I know that *Sohel*’s family members are good people. They possess good hearts. I am sure they will also try to make it easy for her. Her *shoshur bari* is her home now. Do you remember, *Nazma*? Many years ago you were new in this house too, but now this place has become your own.”

Both of them now realise that for a short while, they had a lovely **treasure** in their house that is now a shining **diamond** in another house. Both of them have the same wish, that though *Toma* is far away, wherever she is, *The Almighty** is able to keep her happy, always.

Sharing all these words, *Nazma* finishes her cup of tea. She hears the *doorbell** and leaves the *verandah*. There are visitors from houses nearby to care for on this *Eid* day. She has to speak with them and prepare the food for the table.

While watching her leave, *Sajjad Shaheb* suddenly remembers another special day, long ago, when his *Nazma* was also a new **bride** in this house. Many years ago, she too had to leave her own mother and father and family members. She had to try to make *Shajjad Shaheb*’s family her own family. She had been a **shy** young bride, always afraid that she would make **mistakes**, a young woman who was not so sure about how well she could live with an unknown group of people in an unknown setting. At that time *Sajjad Shaheb* had not understood the worries that *Nazma*’s mother and father must have gone through. *Sajjad Shaheb* himself had been too young to completely understand all these sensitive matters. He tries to remember those early memories of his life and asks himself whether he was sensible enough to stand up for his wife, and help *Nazma* as she tried to become familiar with her new family. Had he too joined forces with his relatives to complain and find **fault** with *Nazma*? Now, years later, now that he himself has become the father of the bride, *Sajjad Shaheb* understands more profoundly the worries a father has for his newly married daughter.



Photo: Kanita Ridwana

He questions himself, thinking back to the time when his neighbours said cruel things and **compared** young *Sajjad's* bright, fair skin with *Nazma's* dark skin. Had he **boasted** silently in his inner mind, or had he been strong and voiced his displeasure and tried to stop their unnecessary and **cruel** words? "How **foolish** and how cruel it is to judge someone on their appearance in that way. Surely a person's inner self and character is far more important", he thinks to himself.

Sajjad Shaheb comes back to the present as his son calls him to the living room. He has a new group of visitors to look after there, who have come to see him on this *Eid* day. *Sajjad Shaheb* enters the room and finds that *Nazma* is sitting there alone after saying goodbye to the earlier *bhabis'* who had come to see her.

She looks at her husband and smiles brightly. "*Jamai* called me to say "*Eid- Mubarak. Sohel* said that they are coming here **tomorrow** to visit us. I told him that you are missing *Toma* so much". *Sajjad Shaheb* looks at his wife with deep love. *Nazma's* dark, beautiful face is shining brightly with the **confidence**, comfort and trust of age. *Sajjad Shaheb* looks at *Nazma* with different eyes. He does not judge her for her appearance. Knowing her so well, he sees her differently from the way others have sometimes seen her. There is neither **pity** nor disrespect in his mind. His regard for her is one of deep understanding that goes beyond the colour of a person's skin. Perhaps he has gained greater wisdom with time and age and experience. At this stage of life, she appears to him with all the **grace** of *Kash Phool* - as **calm** as the *Bangla* season of the *Shorot kal flower*. He remembers that he has already enjoyed *Boshonto kal*. The most important season of his life had already ended after the birth of their three children. The early stage of his married life was like "*Grishmo Kal*", with the beauty and **thunder** of youthful spirit, while in the future before him *Shiit kal* is yet waiting, with both its cold and its **fever**. But

before the appearance of *Shiit kal* there is *Shorot kal* – and then there is *Hemonto kal* - the dewy season which is waiting for him, and then he has to prepare for the cold days of *Shiit kal*. But right at this moment of life now, he is really enjoying the *Shorot kal* time of his life. Right now, there is neither the excitement of wild **storms**, nor the heavy rainfall of the *Borshakal* of early middle age. Neither are there the troubles of winter, but simply the graceful joy of *Kash Phool* - a feeling of **pure** joy and happiness.

Within that sense of joy, *Nazma*, the lovely bride of his youth, once dressed in her fine red *sari**, now appears to him to be filled with a truly **rare** kind of beauty, the beauty that shines from within. With her calm presence and supportive love, he recognises her for what she has always been, his *soulmate**. Yes, he thinks, his daughter *Toma* may be far away, but as precious as she is, it is here, right by his side, where his true treasure lies.

Bangla Words

- **Shoshur Bari**: in-laws' house
- **Shaheb**: Bangladeshi word for Mr.
- **EidulFitr**: One of the largest festivals of Muslim culture
- **Namaz**: Muslims' prayers
- **Muezzin**: the person who gives the daily calls to prayer
- **Eidgaah**: an open field or a place where a lot of people gather to perform special prayers for Eid.
- **Panjabi pyjamas**: male sub-continental dress (usually worn on religious as well as special social and cultural occasions)
- **Tupi**: kind of cap worn during Muslim religious performances
- **Jainamaz**: Muslim Prayer mat
- **Porota**: kind of popular fried bread
- **Vuna**: similar to a spicy curry
- **Khichuri**: kind of fried yellow rice with pulses and vegetables
- **Allah**: The Almighty; The Creator
- **Jorda**: dessert; kind of sweetened red-coloured fried rice
- **Firni**: kind of dessert made with milk, sugar and other ingredients
- **Shemai**: A special, and the most common sweet food eaten during Eid – loved and served everywhere in Bangladesh
- **Atr**: scent (which is usually used for religious occasions)
- **Halowa**: Special sweet sub continental food item
- **Shoshur-shashuri**: mother in law and father in law
- **Bhabi**: the wife of a brother/male friend is called bhabi
- **Jamai**: Son in law
- **Jamat**: a big gathering in open field or in a mosque held for performing Muslim prayer
- **Kolakuli**: when Muslims embrace others of the same sex on Eid day
- **Maa**: mother (often used by parents of their daughters as a sign of love and affection)
- **Eid Mubarak**: Eid greeting

- **Kaash Phool:** Catkin; a flowering spike of trees such as willow and hazel
- **Grishomo kal:** summer season
- **Borsha kal:** rainy season
- **Shorot kal:** autumn
- **Boshonto kal:** spring
- **Hemonto kal:** dewy season (Kartik and Agrahayun): the beginning of the cold season

Learning Activities

Vocabulary - the following words from the second 1000 high frequency General Service Words List. These words are very common in everyday English. How many of them do you already know? Learn the ones that are new to you. Practice using them in your English conversations as much as possible.

abroad	century	delivery	hospital	precious	suddenly
aches	clock	diamond	hurry	pure	taste
afraid	comfort	excited / excitement	imagine	rare	tea
attend	compared	fault	kitchen	relieved	thunder
baby	complain	fever	manage	sad	tomorrow
bathe	confidence	foolish	mistakes	scent	treasure
boasted	cook	grace/ graceful	pauses	shower	treated
breakfast	cruel	healthy	phone	skin	trips
busy	cup	hide	pick (up)	spoil	worries / worry
calm	custom	hole	pity	storms	worse

Glossary

These words and expressions are not so common in English. Learn all the words in the list above **before** you start learning the words below.

- **(The) Almighty** (noun phrase) = A respectful term for God
- **beef** (noun) = meat from a cow
- **bride** (noun) = a woman who is getting married

- **carrot** (noun) = a long, thin orange vegetable
- **doorbell** (noun) = an object that makes a noise which is placed on or near the front door that people press (ring) to let the house owners know someone is visiting
- **festivals** (noun) = special events during the year when people remember and celebrate.
- **festive** (adjective) = like a party, happy, colourful
- **groom** (noun) = a man who is getting married
- **hometown** (noun) = the town in which someone grows up
- **ironing** (noun and verb) = making clothes flat
- **mood** (noun) = a feeling
- **mosque** (noun) = a place of worship. prayer and teaching
- **sari** (noun) = long cloth that wraps around the body to form a woman's dress
- **shy** (adjective) = someone who is quiet and does not like to be noticed when in the company of other people
- **sigh** (noun and verb) = a long outward breath of air. People sigh when they are tired or sad.
- **soulmate** (noun) = the person whom you love, who is just right for you
- **verandah** (noun) = a covered space beside the house where you can relax

Comprehension Questions and Activities

1. **Remembering:** Retell the story in your own words. Try to use at least 10 words from the vocabulary list above that you do NOT already know as you tell the story again.
2. **Understanding:** By the end of the story, we have a clearer idea of who *Shajjad Shaheb's* REAL treasure is. Who is it and how do you know? Which word in the last paragraph gives you a clue?

Critical Thinking Questions

1. **Analysing and Applying:** What are the advantages and disadvantages of marrying and moving away from your family home to live with a new family? What might be the advantages and disadvantages of a newly married couple setting up an entirely separate household of their own? Which would you prefer and why? How would you overcome any problems you might experience in either situation?
2. **Applying:** Is there such a thing as a 'soulmate'? (Give a reason for your answer). What kind of person would be your 'soulmate'. Can you describe him/her, in English? How would you know for sure that he or she was your 'soulmate'?
3. **Evaluating:** *Shajjad Shaheb* seems to be a person who cares about treating others fairly. In your view, how important is it to get to know someone before you make a judgement about them? What qualities are most important in a future marriage partner? How important is someone's appearance in your judgement of that person? How would you feel, if someone quickly decided what kind of person you are based on the way you look? How can someone overcome a wrong first impression of another person?

4. **Creating: Using common sayings in English.** What do these sayings mean? What do they have in common with each other? Can you explain their general meaning in your own words? When would someone use each of these sayings? Can you think of any sayings in your own language that have a similar meaning?

- *Don't judge a book by its cover.*
- *Beauty is only skin deep.*
- *All that glitters is not gold.*
- *Even the moon has its dark side.*
- *Things are not always what they seem. Even salt looks like sugar.*

Choose **one** of the sayings above. With a partner, create a short dialogue in English (no less than six lines). Use the saying you chose in your dialogue. (Write down the words that each person says.)

The situation in which your dialogue takes place should **show the meaning of the saying** clearly. Practise and perform your dialogue to other students without looking at what you have written.