

AN ABSURD GHOST STORY

By Madhumita Ghosh

There are bats in the city. And ghosts too. I had seen them that night.

It was one of those nights when darkness comes alive and whispers are heard rustling through sleeping leaves. A strange smell wafts through the air and one can feel, if one is alert enough, notwithstanding the late hours and burning sleepy eyes, a solid, tangible presence, surreal, in the air.

It was one of those nights. Not that I had seen such nights before. To be honest, I have never seen a lonely night or a night that slept or kept awake throughout, till dawn. Late nights do not exist in my calendar. My day, with a specific date, begins long after the sun has had breakfast and ends abruptly with the 11 o'clock news on the radio. It was no different that night too. I had gone to bed after a sumptuous dinner and after a warm thanksgiving to my wife, had blissfully gone to sleep. The radio had been turned off, for obvious reasons and thus cannot say how long after 11 o'clock it was.

I woke up to a most melodious music that sounded from far away and yet was playing within my head. I heard them from within my ears. The music had a language. It seemed to call me. The night outside was calm, as if it was listening, with rapt attention. Four street dogs whined in the distance, with interim short spells of silence, their treble choirs slicing the night to pieces, the pauses joining them again. I had never seen bats before. Real bats, not the wee fruit bats that enter through open windows in homes in the countryside and blindly flutter around trying to locate an exit point. A flock of bats took off from the tree next to our building and flew haphazardly upwards. They exuded a strange odour that mingled with that of the night and created a smell that almost put me to sleep again.

But I stayed awake, mesmerized. The night curled up, like twirls of black smoke, its darkness taking different shapes and forms, of arms, hands and a shaking head with long flowing tresses that spread wildly in all directions. The sky had disappeared. All that lay before me, above and around me was a thick sheet of darkness that wrapped me within itself. From within the dark cavity I saw the bats circling above, like legless torsos, flapping their joined wings like huge black shawls thrown over their shoulders, with their ends clasped by fingers of two hands. The night danced along, with the bats, in a perfect synchronized choreography. And just then, beams of white light joined them.

From every house there came out, through open windows, shut doors and concrete walls, soft elongated shapes of light, in liquid movements. They circled the night and swayed along to the music that still played within my head. Before I could yearn to join them, I was there, in the centre, with the night, dancing. Looking, from above, at my home, my city, the entire sleeping earth, and me. Yes I saw myself too, a miniscule black dot, no bigger than an ant, trudging up a little hill with what appeared to be a tiny sugar cube that was bigger than my back could hold. The dancing shafts of light laughed and I too, along with them. The night smiled a soft smile and leaving all of us laughing figures in limbo, waved goodbye and left.

The sun rose. The beams of light held hands and merged into one another and spread across a lightening sky.

The dark wiped away and life woke up. Thousands of birds chirruped, planning their day. So much to do. Heights to be scaled and a sky to explore. They flew out of their leafy homes, one by one, and then in flocks, in search of new hope.

Bio:

Prof. Dr.MadhumitaGhosh, is also a poet and editor of anthologies of Poetry books. Her poems have been widely published in print, e-books, journals and magazines all over the world, in places like Canada, UK, Ghana, Bangladesh and India.

She has authored four poetry books titled For All You Lovely People, Pebbles On The Shore, Flowing with the River, My Poetry My Voice and also an academic book, William Blake, A Prophet for Mankind.