

LACC Writing Contest (E.S.L.) Short story – Honorable Mention

Title : The Greatest Punishment

Entrant : S M Keramat Ali

The Greatest Punishment

(A True Story)

It was the summer season in 1981 in Bangladesh, a developing country of South Asia. Usually many fruits like mangoes, litchi, jackfruit etc. ripen at this time, and rural restless children enjoy them climbing up the trees. I am Ali and I was about 12 year old school going little boy then. The summer vacation was going on, and there was no pressure of study. So I was busy with other village boys playing, climbing up trees, swimming in ponds and many more. Yellowish half ripened mangoes were hanging under the branches of mango trees. At about noon, I took a knife from home and climbed on a mango tree near the paddies to have fresh mangoes. I was busy sorting out ripe mangoes, picking up and eating them. I was in a relaxed mood. Alongside eating mangoes, I was enjoying the nature and breeze. The green rice plants

looked beautiful because they were dancing in the monsoon air. Suddenly my relaxation was interrupted by a shout of a passerby.

In the meantime, he shouted to me that a cow and her about six month old calf were eating and damaging our crops. I like to add that my father was an elementary teacher as well as a farmer. He had several plots of fields where rice, pulses and vegetables were grown in abundance. Hearing this, I became crazy. Without further delay, I climbed down from the tree and rushed to the field. It was not easy to move through the fields because they were muddy. Some day labors noticed what I was going to do. Without looking to and fro, I kept going forward to the field where the cow and her calf were eating and damaging our crops. As soon as I reached there, I started to chase them away.

Immediately after holding the knife in his right hand, I was waiving it in the air to scare the cow and her calf. They were running moving up their tails. I followed them and stabbed the mother cow as well as her calf on the backs repeatedly while chasing them away from the rice paddies. I was running after them at a great pace. The frightened cow along with her calf was running fast to save their lives. They crossed fields after fields. I was following them. My goal was only to save our crops

and no other thought was on my mind at that moment. Moreover, it did not come to his notice that the cow and the calf were being hurt. Anyway, I successfully chased them from the field and saved our family crops.

After returning home from the field, I took a bath and ate lunch with my family except for my father who was at his work place. Then, I started reading books that I borrowed from the school library. At about 4 pm, my beloved mother sent me to bed for a nap. I pretended to nap because I was forced to do so. All of a sudden from my room, I overheard an old man crying and telling everything about what had happened to the cow and the calf. My heart started beating fast. Still then, I could not figure out what had happened.

In fact, the old man was none but the owner of the cows who was a poor villager. He lived from hand to mouth. He came to know from an eye witness that I had hurt his cow and calf while chasing them away. So he took the injured cow and the calf to our home to show my parent what I had done to them. My mother was very much upset at the sight because the places where I had stabbed several times had widened and they were bleeding from the sites where there were several injuries. At that moment, the calf was trembling in severe pain. The mother cow stood helplessly

and tried to cure the injury by using her tongue. Her eyes were full of tears but she had nothing to do. Small flies were trying to sit on the injuries which hurt them all the more. Both of them were using their tails to save them from flies. Then I began to realize what I had done to the innocent animals.

What a heart wrenching scene it was! My mom became dumb and there was almost no consoling word for the injured animals as well as the poor man, but she thought that the cow and her calf had to be taken to the nearby animal care center for immediate treatment. She assured the owner that she would bear all the costs of the treatment. In addition, she expressed her great sorrow for the whole situation on behalf of me. At the same time, to save me from punishment, she requested the man to not speak of the matter to my dad.

With a great fear in mind, I was peeping through the window and observing everything. In one side, the helpless mother cow was standing with her calf and the other side, a mother was trying heart and soul to save her son from punishment. Then I could realize that the punishment I gave to the innocent cow and her calf is the greatest punishment for me throughout my life. Whenever I recall the incident, I feel ashamed and tears drop down from my eyes. Now as a mature man, I still feel guilty

for the heinous crime that I had committed in my childhood without realizing the consequences. Now, it is my feeling that as human beings, we should love every creature of God and be humane to them.