

Impact Factor: 8.67

ISSN:0976-8165

*The Criterion*

# THE CRITERION

AN INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL IN ENGLISH

Bi-Monthly Peer-Reviewed eJournal

**15** YEARS OF OPEN ACCESS

VOL. 15 ISSUE-6 DECEMBER 2024

Editor-In-Chief: **Dr. Vishwanath Bite**  
Managing Editor: **Dr. Madhuri Bite**

[www.the-criterion.com](http://www.the-criterion.com)

AboutUs: <http://www.the-criterion.com/about/>

Archive: <http://www.the-criterion.com/archive/>

ContactUs: <http://www.the-criterion.com/contact/>

EditorialBoard: <http://www.the-criterion.com/editorial-board/>

Submission: <http://www.the-criterion.com/submission/>

FAQ: <http://www.the-criterion.com/fa/>



**Galaxy: International Multidisciplinary Research Journal**  
[www.galaxyimrj.com](http://www.galaxyimrj.com)

**ISSN 2278-9529**

## **The Scent of Jasmine**

**Mst Sabrina Moktar Arju**

MA in English Literature and Cultural Studies,  
Department of English,  
Bangladesh University of Professionals.

I woke to find myself surrounded by a crowd, their curious faces leaning in, whispering among themselves. My eyes darted around, but my voice betrayed me. I tried to speak, to ask where I was, but no sound came. My throat felt locked, as though bound by invisible chains. I recognized none of them, yet they seemed to know me. Whispers floated in the air, “She’s a student,” someone said. “From a prestigious institution.” Their words struck me like shards of glass. Me? A student? I laughed bitterly in my mind. They didn’t know that I had never stepped inside a classroom.

The street where I now stood was unfamiliar. Yet, how many streets had I roamed with baskets of jasmine garlands, trying to sell them to make ends meet? This street was no different from the countless others, except for the suffocating weight of my memories pressing down on me. I closed my eyes, and the scent of jasmine transported me to a time when my world was painted in bright colors. My father was my hero, a man who carried the weight of our small world on his broad shoulders. Despite his meager earnings, he never failed to bring home a jasmine garland for my mother. Those small gestures of love were the essence of our happiness.

But life, I learned, has a way of shattering the most delicate dreams. It began with a reckless car, a screech, and a crash. My father lost his legs in the accident, but not his spirit. For months, he fought against despair, wheeling himself to work in his battered wheelchair. He refused to let our family crumble. But my mother was a different story. She loved comfort, adored wealth. The sight of my father’s broken body and the harshness of our poverty became too much for her to bear. One evening, without a word, she left us. Rumors swirled that she had gone to live with a wealthy man named Abir. But the truth didn’t matter. Her absence was a wound that never healed.

My father, already battered by fate, could not endure this final betrayal. He withdrew into himself, his laughter and hope snuffed out like a candle in the wind. One night, unable to

bear the weight of his pain, he doused himself in kerosene and struck a match. The flames consumed him, and with him, my childhood ended. The jasmine garlands I now sold on the streets became my lifeline. Each flower reminded me of my father's love and the fleeting moments of happiness we had shared. But they also bore the weight of my mother's abandonment and the fire that had stolen everything from me. I returned to the present, the crowd still encircling me. My knees gave way, and I collapsed to the ground.

The voices around me blurred into a cacophony. "She fainted," someone said. "Call an ambulance!" another cried. Through the haze, I saw a face. A woman, her features achingly familiar, stepped closer. My heart twisted in my chest. Could it be...? The woman knelt beside me, her eyes wide with shock. "Do you know me?" she asked softly, her voice trembling. I wanted to scream, to pour out the years of pain and anger. But all I managed was a weak nod. Tears spilled from her eyes as she whispered, "I'm so sorry."

Her words were like a knife twisting in an old wound. Sorry? Was that all she had to offer after destroying our family? After leaving us to fend for ourselves? She reached out to touch me, but I flinched. Her hand froze mid-air, and the regret in her eyes deepened. "I looked for you," she murmured. "I came back, but you were gone." I stared at her, searching her face for the truth. Could I believe her? Or was this just another story she had spun for her convenience? But before I could decide, the world around me began to fade. The last thing I saw was her face, twisted in anguish, as darkness claimed me.

When I woke, I was in a hospital bed. The sterile smell of antiseptic replaced the familiar scent of jasmine. My mother sat beside me, her hands clutching mine. For a moment, I thought it was a dream. But the weight of her gaze told me it was real.

"I'm here now," she said, her voice thick with emotion. "If you'll let me, I want to make things right." The words hung in the air between us. I wanted to believe her, to let her back into my life. But trust, once broken, is not easily mended. The jasmine garland she had brought lay on the bedside table, its scent filling the room. I closed my eyes and inhaled deeply, letting it transport me back to the days when my father's love was enough to fill our small world. Perhaps, just perhaps, I could find it in me to forgive. But not yet. Not today. For now, I would take it one breath, one jasmine-scented memory, at a time.

After a few hours of sleeping, when I opened my eyes, the dim light of the hospital room blurred against the sharp realization of where I was. My mother sat at my bedside, her hands clasping mine tightly, her lips moving in silent prayers. For a fleeting moment, I thought I had found my way back to her warmth. But then my gaze shifted to the man sitting beside her, and the memories from the previous night struck like lightning. “Do you know who this is?” my mother asked, her voice trembling with excitement. “He’s your new father.”

Father. The word felt like poison, burning through my veins. My heart hammered as I locked eyes with the man. His face remained calm, his lips curling into a practiced smile, but his eyes darted away, betraying a flicker of unease. This man wasn’t just anyone. He was the one. The one who had shattered my world the night before. I had been standing by the roadside with my basket of jasmine garlands, the night alive with the hum of traffic and the occasional bark of street dogs. His car had pulled up, sleek and black, the window rolling down to reveal his face. “Come closer,” he had said, his voice smooth and reassuring. “I’ll buy all your flowers.”

Hopeful and desperate for a decent sale, I had approached. The smell of leather and expensive cologne filled my senses as he leaned out, smiling. Before I could react, he had yanked me inside, and the car sped off into the darkness. What followed was a nightmare, a haze of fear, pain, and violation that left me broken and screaming for help that never came. When he finally let me go, tossing me out onto the street like discarded trash, I had thought that was the end. But here he was now, in my hospital room, sitting beside my mother as if he belonged here. I stared at him, my breath catching in my throat. Did he recognize me? Did he know who I was? Or was this some cruel twist of fate, the universe throwing us together in a game I couldn’t understand? “This is your new father,” my mother said again, her voice softer now. She looked at me, her eyes wide with hope. “He’ll take care of us. He loves us.”

Her words hung in the air, sharp and suffocating. Loves us? This man didn’t know the meaning of love. He only knew how to destroy. My body trembled, anger and fear warring inside me. Should I tell her? Could I? My mother had left me once before. Would she believe me now, or would she choose him over me, as she had chosen comfort over family so many years ago?

I clenched my fists, my nails digging into my palms. The room seemed to shrink, the walls closing in as memories of my father flooded my mind. What would he do if he were

alive? My father had been broken, yes, but his heart had been whole. He had loved me unconditionally. He would have protected me. But now, it was just me, facing the man who had stolen everything.

The jasmine garland on the bedside table caught my eye, its sweet scent, a cruel reminder of my father's love and the innocence I had lost. I reached for it, clutching it tightly as if it could give me strength. The man shifted uncomfortably in his chair, his facade beginning to crack. My mother, oblivious to the tension, continued speaking. "He's been so kind to me, taking care of everything. He's the reason you're here, safe and sound."

Safe? The irony nearly made me laugh. I wanted to scream, to tear the mask from his face and reveal the monster beneath. But fear held me back. What if he denied it? What if my mother turned against me?

Finally, I found my voice. It was weak, but it carried the weight of my resolve. "Mother," I said, my eyes never leaving his. "Do you really know this man?" She frowned, confused. "What do you mean? Of course, I do. He's your new father." I turned to him, my voice growing stronger. "Tell her." His smile faltered. "I don't know what you're talking about."

"Tell her who you really are," I said, each word a dagger aimed at his composure. My mother looked between us, alarm creeping into her expression. "What's going on? What are you saying?" I ignored her, my focus solely on him. "If you don't tell her, I will." He stood abruptly, his chair scraping against the floor. "I think she's confused," he said, his voice tight. "She's been through a lot. Maybe we should let her rest."

But I wasn't done. The jasmine garland in my hand crumpled as my grip tightened. "Do you think I've forgotten?" I said, my voice rising. "Last night. The car. Do you think I don't remember what you did to me?"

The room fell silent. My mother's face drained of color as she looked at me, then at him. "What is she talking about?" she whispered. He stammered, his calm demeanor crumbling. "She's delusional. She doesn't know what she's saying." But the truth was out now, hanging in the air like a storm cloud. My mother turned to me, her eyes searching mine. "Is this true?" Tears streamed down my face as I nodded. "Yes. He's the one. He hurt me. He ruined

me.” For a moment, she just stared at me, her face a mixture of shock and disbelief. Then, slowly, her gaze shifted to him. “Is this true?” she asked, her voice trembling. He opened his mouth, but no words came. The mask was gone, and all that remained was the monster. My mother stood, her body shaking. “Get out,” she said, her voice low but firm. He hesitated, but the fury in her eyes left no room for argument. He turned and left without another word, the door slamming shut behind him. My mother sank to her knees beside my bed, tears streaming down her face. I wanted to comfort her, to tell her it wasn’t her fault. But the pain was too fresh, the wounds too deep. All I could do was hold the jasmine garland to my chest and let its scent remind me of a love that had been real, of a father who would have fought for me with everything he had. And maybe, just maybe, I could find the strength to fight for myself.

But I was wrong. My new world has been shattered within a moment. The room grew quiet after my mother’s words. Her voice, sharp and devoid of empathy, still echoed in my ears. “Forget everything,” she had said. “Talking about it will only ruin us. People won’t let us live in this society. Where will I go? Where will you go? Society has no place for a girl like you. And without money, this world doesn’t move. Money is power, my daughter. Whatever happened, forget it and move on.” She left the room without another glance, leaving me to sit with her cold reasoning. The jasmine garland I clutched felt foreign now, its once comforting scent an unbearable weight. Her words, like poison, seeped into my mind: *Forget everything. Move on.*

But how could I? The very thought of forgetting felt like erasing myself. Yet, I stayed silent. My anger, my grief, and my growing hatred for her burned silently within me. That night, I lay awake, the hospital’s faint hum offering no solace. Shadows danced on the ceiling, morphing into shapes I didn’t recognize. I could feel the walls closing in, suffocating me. I had no one. My father was gone. My mother, my only remaining family, had chosen comfort and survival over my pain. Then I thought of him, my so-called “new father.” The monster. Did he think he had won? Did he believe my mother’s silence would protect him? That I would simply shrink into the shadows and let him carry on, unpunished? A strange calmness settled over me as a thought took root in my mind: *I will not be silent.*

The next day, I asked the nurse if I could borrow her phone. She hesitated but relented when I gave her a pleading look. My hands trembled as I dialed the number I remembered from the back of a bus—an NGO that worked with women and children. I had seen their posters in passing, their promises of justice and safety lingering like a whisper in the back of my mind.

“Hello?” a woman’s voice answered, firm but kind. I hesitated, my heart pounding. Then, with a shaky breath, I told her everything. The jasmine garlands. The car. The man. My mother’s words. When I finished, there was silence on the other end of the line. For a moment, I thought she had hung up. But then she spoke. “You’ve done the right thing by calling us,” she said, her voice steady. “We will help you. You are not alone.”

Her words felt like a lifeline, pulling me from the depths of despair. Two days later, my mother walked into my hospital room, her face pale. “We need to leave,” she said abruptly, her voice laced with fear. “They’re asking questions. The police came to the house today.” I looked at her, my heart pounding. “What did they ask?”

“They know about you. About... him,” she said, her voice breaking. “Why did you do this? Do you want to destroy us?” “Destroy us?” I repeated, my voice rising. “He destroyed me! And you want me to stay silent for what? Money? Respect from a society that will never accept me?” Her eyes darted around the room as if the walls could shield her from the truth. “You don’t understand,” she whispered. “We can’t fight this. Money wins. Power wins. Not us.”

“I don’t care,” I said, my voice trembling with anger. “I won’t let him get away with it. If you won’t fight, I will.”

For the first time, she looked afraid, not for herself, but of me. The police came to the hospital later that day. I told them everything. My voice, though hesitant at first, grew stronger with each word. The officers listened; their faces solemn but determined. By evening, the man was in custody. I watched the news from the hospital bed as his face flashed across the screen. My mother sat silently beside me, her hands trembling.

“This isn’t over,” she whispered.

“I know,” I said. “But it’s a start.” That night, as I lay in the dark, the jasmine garland still beside me, I realized that my journey was just beginning. The road ahead would be hard. People would judge, whisper, and try to break me. But I would not be silent. The scent of jasmine filled the room, a reminder of the love and strength my father had left behind. And for the first time in a long while, I felt hope.

**Author's Biography:**

Mst Sabrina Moktar Arju is an emerging writer and currently pursuing an MA in English Literature and Cultural Studies at Bangladesh University of Professionals. She completed her BA in English Language and Literature from the same institution. Her research interests span feminist theory, gender dynamics, and psychological aspects of literature. She is passionate about exploring the intersection of literature and social issues. Her work seeks to illuminate gender expression, gender identity, sex and sexuality, existentialism, power, and narrative in contemporary texts.