



THE BRIDGE
E-MAGAZINE

Volume-II
2022-2023



FEATURED POET
Dieter Bruhn
Page 41



THE BRIDGE VOLUME-II-2022-2023

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THE BRIDGE MAGAZINE VOLUME-II

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Cover design: Qasim Nawaz
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CONTENTS

07

Fiction

It Would Only Worry You 08
James FITZGIBBON - UK

Silence 14
Taha Kehar - Pakistan

My dear Mitthoo 17
Sobia Kiran - Pakistan

Welcome Home 19
Rohma Ahmed - Pakistan

Unraveling Love's Tapestry 24
Rukha Khalid - Pakistan

The Misty Street 27
Fatima Irfan - Pakistan

Close Calls and Heroic Feats 32
Asfa Iman - Pakistan

The Beautiful Curse 33
Gull Javed - Pakistan

The Library Book 35
Hina Inayat - Pakistan

The Invisible Child 36
Hina Inayat - Pakistan

Someone Came to Life 37
Rabail Saeed - Pakistan

The Late Pick-up 39
Narjis Raza - Pakistan

41

Featured Poet

Dieter Bruhn 42
An Epitome of Creative Genius!

Shattered Wings 44
Dieter Bruhn - USA

Masks 45
Dieter Bruhn - USA

Mirror, Mirror on the Wall 46
Dieter Bruhn - USA

CONTENTS

47

Poems

Telling and Showing

Rizwan Akhtar - Pakistan 48

Ghazal: Voice

Rizwan Akhtar - Pakistan 49

Naomie

Stephanie Barbe Hammer - UHSA 50

Untitled

Maryam Raza - Pakistan 51

Just Alive!

Zakia Nasir - Pakistan 53

The Apathy of Silence!

Zakia Nasir - Pakistan 54

Again Ends the Lockdown

Sufia Humayun - Pakistan 55

A Symphony of Souls

Zargham Khan - Pakistan 56

A Thought

Amna Khawaja - Pakistan 57

The Day Is Upon Us

Momina Raza - Pakistan 58

Echoes of The Nile- Cleopatra

Momina Raza 59

I Belong

Madiha Mustafa 60

Carpe Diem

Madiha Mustafa - Pakistan 61

A New Strategy

Sadia Munawar - Pakistan 63

Moonlight Epiphany

Narjis Raza - Pakistan 64

Sugarcoated

Labeeqa Baneen - Pakistan 65

Magic

Labeeqa Baneen - Pakistan 66

Storms Raging Within

Imama Khawaja - Pakistan 67

Scars, Oh Scars!

Asfa Iman 68

To Dear Self

Amina Ali - Pakistan 69

CONTENTS

The Biker in my Town! <i>Ayesha Tariq - Pakistan</i>	70	85	
71		Young Minds	
Women Health		Luckily for You <i>Haris Irfan - Pakistan</i>	86
Importance of Exercise for Female Health <i>Faryal Arshad - Pakistan</i>	72	THE HAUNTED HOUSE <i>Hiba Bukhari - Pakistan</i>	87
77		Math : A Headache <i>Naymah - Pakistan</i>	88
Articles		89	
Human Rights <i>Dr Saima Eman - Pakistan</i>	78	Art	
A Strange Mystery! <i>Amina Ali - Pakistan</i>	81	Sketch Work <i>Shaista Manzoor</i>	
It is Okay to Not be Okay! <i>Aleena Rehman - Pakistan</i>	82	92	
		Advertisements	

EDITOR'S NOTE



The Power of Human Brain!

With the world swiftly slipping towards scientific advancement, post human concepts and enthralling encroachment of artificial intelligence, it is very essential and yet very difficult to stay connected with one's roots. I say roots because that is the right word for almost everything that I am referring to. Roots that remind us that we are humans, and real, and unique, but not artificial at all. It is important to value and understand the distinctiveness of our existence, the vulnerability of our thoughts and the dread of our absence. We must also realize that of all the inventions man has made, not a single one can reach the complexity and excellence of one divine creation -- human brain.

My dear brother introduced me to Chat GPT some time back. Intrigued as I was, I checked and found it interesting. I do agree that technology has made life easy, on all levels. But the idea that it can replace humans is ridiculously absurd. There is nothing on earth that can replace us. We are and will remain the central focus. The creation cannot surpass the creator. That is taken for granted.

I was glad to notice that Chat GPT, like countless other advanced systems created by man, has its limitations. It cannot imagine things. It cannot explore more than one perspective concurrently. Its data has to be updated by us, humans. We supervise it. If we don't, it wouldn't work for long. Such a delight!

Human mind is capable of imagining and creating stories beyond the reach of all artificiality and all intelligence. The capacity of this imagination has not been measured yet, and would not be measured ever. The written word coming out directly from a writer's pen is different than the same word that Chat GPT creates. It is different in so many beautiful ways. We need to understand this.

The current edition of The Bridge E-Magazine takes you to a world of imagination that is purely human and far more intriguing than all the intelligently artificial sources. From a collection of rhythmic verses that directly reach out to your soul to the assortment of diverse human experiences captured by brilliant prose and fiction writers, you are welcome to dive in this river of creativity and come out re-energized, and enlightened!

Enjoy Reading!

A handwritten signature in green ink that reads "Aaisha".

Aaisha Umt Ur Rashid

Editor in Chief

(Founder /CEO of The Bridge)

THE BRIDGE MAGAZINE

Vol. II
September 2023

EDITORIAL

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The Bridge Magazine Volume.III

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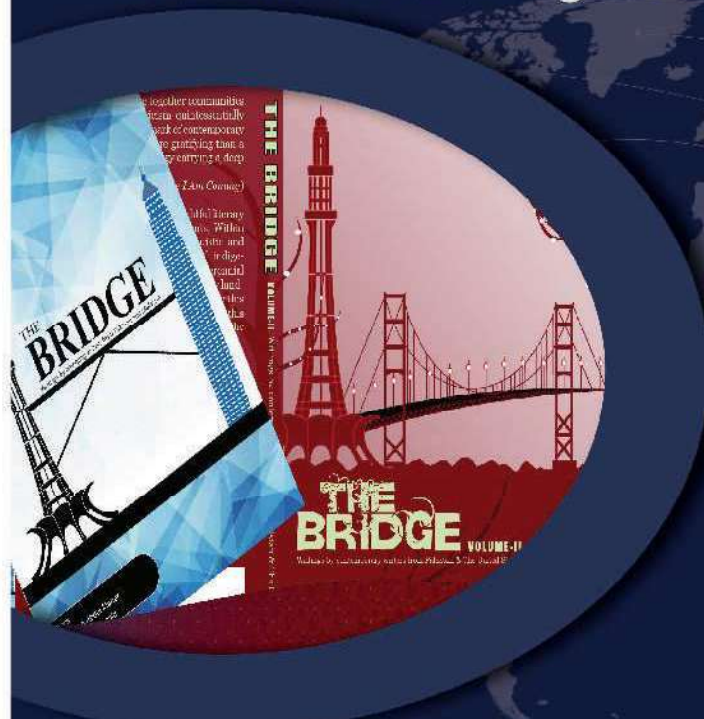
Magazine is published on the website annually and accepts contributions from **1st September till 31st December 2023**. The magazine has the following submission categories:

- Short Story
- Poetry
- Flash-Fiction
- Book Reviews
- Articles
- One Liner Quotes
- One Act Play Scripts
- Memoirs
- Travelogues
- Jokes

The Bridge Magazine is an opportunity for you to explore multifarious genres of writing and experiment with innovative ideas. So join us to enjoy being a part of the third edition of the magazine coming out next year. For details on submission criteria, visit and register on:
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Fiction



2022
WINNER



James FITZGIBBON
United Kingdom

Fourth International
Writing Competition Winner
(Flash)

It Would Only Worry You

That night a soft piano music was playing. It moved and shifted direction like an animal in a snare. Strange, wild chords softly stroked the air. Suddenly, I recall, you looked up from playing with a coaster and said, ‘Music can transport you right back. When I was a kid, we’d always have this music here playing: I heard it again the other day for the first time ever. And there I was: back at home. I could almost smell the furniture wax my Mum used to use’.

‘What was the music?’ I asked.

‘Ah... bof’, you said with a gesture of dismissal. ‘You wouldn’t know it. Just something particular to our family home. I had begun to love those French gestures, which, to my mind, belonged only to you.

‘It was playing that night I recall’, you said. ‘What night was that?’

You looked up at me and I could see the hesitation in your eyes. They had changed again, from the sparkling blue-grey from when we first met that evening, to a sad, rather forlorn, dull colour. ‘I’ve never told anyone this story before’, you said slowly, with deliberation ‘Must be the music. I can feel it now. Reminds me of home. Chez nous. I can feel it all coming flooding back comme les vagues. I can recall that night almost as if I was there right now.

‘Do you want me to tell you what happened?’ you asked.

‘Of course’, I said. ‘OK’, you sighed ‘But don’t blame me if I go on a bit. It’s quite a long story. That all-right?’

You shifted your position and pushed your hair back. It seemed that you were happy to share your memories. And I was hanging on your every word!



Winner: James FITZGIBBON - United Kingdom

‘OK’, you said. ‘Do you remember me telling you that Mum was from Lyon? And that we lived there at the time? And you said that you had spent some time there?’

I nodded.

‘Well, when I was a child, I’d been playing in the street that day there when she called me in for supper:

‘Viens, Cherie. C’est prêt, le repas. Ne le laisse pas refroidir’, she sang through the kitchen window.

‘That was the sound of home. It’s the voice in my head. Ha! She always called like that. And I always waited for it – like that day. I must have been about eleven at the time. But it was the feeling of being wanted! Of being cared for. Of being loved, I suppose, that was so special to me. I still carry her voice and those feelings around with me wherever I go. I keep them in a special drawer in my mind. They are dear memories to me. Maybe the most important I can recall.

‘Anyway, that evening – that Autumn evening - I came immediately. It was getting cold outside: I remember the leaves on the road where we children played. I remember the pigeons standing on one leg because the ground was so cold. That music was playing in the kitchen. The first thing I noticed when I entered the kitchen was my Dad’s empty chair. This was no real surprise as he was often absent – usually drunk in some bar, drinking away the household money, as Mum used to say. Mum was only thirty-five but looked closer to fifty. Her eyes had lost that brightness I associated with her in her younger days. She just looked sad and worried.

‘I can see her now’, Agnes said. ‘She was a sweet

soul. So trusting. So compassionate. Her looks when she was younger betrayed how cruelly life had treated her’.

The music had come to an end. She broke off, unsure whether to continue. And your eyes reached out to mine. That inviting fluid grey!

‘Are you sure you want to hear all this?’ you asked me with a laugh.

‘Sure!’ I said. ‘In fact, I’ll see if I can replay that music’.

You brushed back your fringe: another of the gestures I loved about you. It was girlish and playful and so feminine all at the same time.

‘On your way, could you get me another wine?’ you asked.

I looked for the music on the juke-box, found it and inserted a coin. When I got back with the drinks, I could see that you were in another world. You were there in France. You began to look innocent. It seemed clear that you were no longer in that London bar with me, but in a place far away. You were that girl again in your Lyon family home on that Autumn evening.

Even before I could hardly sit down, you began: ‘The night descended’, you said in a dreamlike way. ‘My mother was sewing by the little window. The lamp lit up the lace curtains – La dentelle. My mother, Marie, she looked concentrated. I knew that expression. I used to think she was going over conversations in her mind for one moment she would look pensive, the next surprised, then angry, then a look that seemed to say: ‘I told you so’. The music was playing on the gramophone next to her. She re-started the record when it was finished,





Winner: James FITZGIBBON - United Kingdom

lifting the stylus-arm and re-setting it on the outside track of the old 33. The doll that I had as a baby, that always sat in that window, seemed to sway with the music.

‘Those strange chords. The slow, deliberate passage of the music. Suddenly getting louder. Then softer. It was gently haunting, that piano music. Dropping to a soft lull, then beginning again. And then going off in strange tangents. Then big fat rich notes, gently over-laid with odd, yet beautiful strokes. In the background, the melody continued. Then another piece would play.

I used to dream to that music’, you said floatingly – I was trying to catch a butterfly. The grass was thick and green, apart from where the daisies were. And the apple tree was old. It seemed so large, but really it wasn’t. There was a place about halfway up where you could sit. And that was where the butterflies waited. I imagined they would talk to each-other about apples, and pollen. They spoke in a strange language of clicks and whistles. And I would try to capture one with my chubby, pink hands. They looked and flew off ... just flew away!

‘And then suddenly mother used to prick herself and murmured ‘putain’ under her breath. She seemed to do it every night. There was a little gap where the window didn’t fit in properly with the frame and, on cold nights, a draught would blow in. It got quite cold there by the window. My mother’s knuckles used to go white. And she’d begin to look more concentrated. Until she’d announce suddenly that it was time for bed:

“Alors. C’est l’heure de coucher”. And that was when we’d slowly make our way upstairs and into our freezing rooms. With the freezing sheets.

And we’d lie there under the heavy bed-clothes, waiting. Waiting for my father. In silent dread. Just the clouds of our breath would rise and disappear into that cold air.

‘And then all was silent.

‘Sometimes I just didn’t fall asleep. And sometimes, just as I dozed off, I was awoken by heavy sounds from the kitchen downstairs. My father had returned! That night, I had fallen into a fitful sleep, but there were many like it. First of all, the latch would complain about being tugged too violently.

Then the door would slam shut, rattling the window-frames. Then invariably a crash on the table where he fell. And a loud “putain”.

‘After rattling around in the kitchen for what seemed an age, he would try to make his way upstairs. Then the awful thud of his foot on the first stair. Thump ... thump. There were eleven stairs. And each one groaned and creaked. I counted the thuds. Thump ... thump. All the way up to the landing. We had left the hall light on. There were two steps just outside my room and these creaked the loudest. Often my father found

these the most difficult. And he would crash against the wall. If I was not awake, I certainly would be, especially as it was accompanied by another “putain! Cest galère ou quoi!”.

‘But usually I was awake, the thuds ringing in my mind like the slow approach of some dreaded monster. Then the crash against the wall, then the click of the light-switch. Sometimes he forgot that bit. And then the opening of my parent’s bedroom, creaking through lack of oil.

‘The walls were very thin and I could hear them clearly. It was like I was there.





Winner: James FITZGIBBON - United Kingdom

‘My Mother, who was probably as awake as I, had long given up on the “Drunk again?” approach and instead, asked who he had seen that evening.

“Oh, just Jean-Paul and Xavier”, he responded, slurring his words. The excitement of the evening was over for him and all that remained was this – the domestic scene, which, he felt, was very much like the coming down after a high. *La réalité apres la fantaisie**”.

You looked down at the table and said: ‘Reality after Fantasy’. Then you continued again in a gruff, masculine, but rather drunken, way: “Actually”, he said, sitting on the bed and kicking off his shoes “your fancy-man was there. You know: strutting around and feeling everyone was looking”

“And who do you think that might be?”

“You know – what’s ‘is face? Charles”

“He’s not my fancy-man as you say!” my Mother said in disgust. “He’s revolting! With his wine dribbling down his chin...”

‘I could hear the rustle of linen:

‘She violently pulled the bed-clothes up to the top of her neck and added.

“Do you think I’d call that my fancy-man?”

‘I imagined my father wagging his finger at her’

“Ha! I see you Marie. Always making eyes at him. Don’t think I don’t see you. It’s no wonder I prefer to go on my own. Without you flirting, and flapping your lashes!”

‘He fell heavily into bed, pushing Marie to one side.

“You think you’ll get me all jealous! Well, I couldn’t care less. Just embarrassing, that’s all. The boys were all saying: ‘There goes Henri, with his affectionate cat’. Remember the last time you came. All over Charles, you were. Like a cheap coat. Filthy slut!”

‘In my bedroom, I was clutching the sheets and blankets up to my chin. My whole world and all the sounds in it were going on in that room. And how my poor mother was trying to cope. And I felt afraid for her. And how she could safely endure the night. With that brute’.

You looked up and said with conviction: ‘Yes, he was my father. That stupid drunk man was my father. C’est pas vrai! Insupportable! Really: sometimes, I feel like crying out-loud: “It’s so unfair! You stole my childhood. Cochon!”

‘Then, I heard a groan and my father saying, “Move over, will you? Then ma mère said something, though I couldn’t hear what.

“That’s none of your business, woman. How dare you ask me that!’ ‘The bed creaked and my mother said something else that made him really mad and shout like a maniac.

“How dare you? How dare you speak to me like that? You know what? You’re in for a fucking good hiding, so help me God”.

‘I heard him try to take the belt out of his trousers, but I guess he fell on the floor because there was an almighty crash. I could hear him fumbling about for a bit, then I guess he gave up. He hit her with his fist instead. I could hear it from my room.





Winner: James FITZGIBBON - United Kingdom

His fist against her skull. Then, the sobs. My father kept saying over and over again: “Just keep outta my way”. He got up. He was really livid now, almost murderously so. “My money’s me own! You or anyone can’t tell me what to do with it”

‘I could hear my Mum being pushed into the walls, so I got out of bed and burst into their room. I’d been crying, silently so they might not hear, but now I was there to help. “Not you. Or nobody”, he half shouted, half spat out, as he hit her “Nobody!”.

But this time I got in the way and he hit me instead. It didn’t seem to matter to him. He just kept on, and on. His eyes were fierce as if he was in some fight to the death. He was like a wild animal. I remember asking him if he knew who he was hitting, but he said: “Yeah. You’re all the same. Whores. Bitches ...”. His anger was tailing off now, his punches were becoming less and less hard. In the end, he just stood against the wall, and slowly sank down to his knees. Then sitting with his legs drawn up. And he started sobbing, his nose running mucus down into his mouth, his eyes red and bloodshot. But they had lost that wildness. Instead, he looked dejected. Broken. He said in a whisper: “Look at what you’ve made me do. Marie. Ma fille. My beautiful family. Forgive me! Can you?”

And my mother reached out to hold him. I remember there was blood running down into my eyes, but I said: “What are you doing, Mum? *C’est connard ou quoi, ce type*”

Back in London, I reached for your hand. The touch seemed to jolt you back into the present. And slowly, you focused on me and said, ‘We left that house that night. We just walked around the streets of Croix Rousse, down to the Beaux Arts, down

to Bellecourt. When morning came, we bought bus tickets to Grenoble’, you said matter-of-factly. ‘We stayed with my Mum’s brother and his wife’.

‘What happened to your Dad?’ I asked.

‘Dunno’, you said dreamily. ‘That was the last time I ever saw him. Never heard from him again. Mum said he lost the house. Funny thing was that it wasn’t even his! Another thing lost!’ You gave a bitter laugh. ‘He lost it at cards. That was a couple of years ago. Heard nothing after that. He probably died in a gutter somewhere.

‘Anyway, my Mum didn’t get on well with her brother’s wife’, you said sipping your wine. It was like a spell had suddenly been broken.

“My Mum got a job à l’alimentation and we lived in a little flat until I left for university here. I remember saying to her: “Come with me – we can make a new life. In London”. But she didn’t want to. She said she was too old for all that and that her place was there. That was nearly five years ago’.

‘Have you seen your mother since?’ I asked.

‘Nope’, you said. ‘She sends me a card and a letter from time to time. For my Birthday and at Christmas. She seems happy enough. Still working at the grocer’s’.

And you trailed off. Then said, ‘My Mum’s like my home. That’s what she represents to me’.

We were silent for a time. No one really wanted to talk. The French have a good expression for this: ‘L’ange passe’, a quiet pause in the conversation. Anyway, after that the evening passed and you left





Winner: James FITZGIBBON - United Kingdom

early. You seemed to be in a hurry. I had hoped of inviting you back to my place and share a bottle of wine. But you said you had a headache and, at the door of the pub, you slipped away and disappeared into the wet London night.

Alone that night, when I got back, I pondered what you'd said to me. They were like pieces in a jig-saw. I had been a student in that city – Lyon. I did my dissertation that year on the tramps you see everywhere there - 'Les Clochards'. People descend into being in these ranks in many different ways and not just not having enough money to rent a house or flat. No: many incidents of a bad nature or misfortunes might lead a person into a psychological rut of one kind or another, which can ease the way down ... and down, spiralling down. To those circles of Hell, and cold, empty neon-lit streets all alone. With only the rain to keep you company.

I was a student at the university there for a year. I decided to work in a soup kitchen to help these people, but also to gather some information from speaking with them. And so, from that October, over the cold winter months, to the Spring, I dished out 'la potage' with great hunks of bread to the unfortunates of the city. I tried to speak with them as often as I could. I met a middle-aged woman called Marie. She said she'd been beaten by her husband. She said she had lived in Lyon but she couldn't even remember the address; she vaguely recalls it being in the Croix Rousse area. At that time, she spent her days traipsing the streets, going everywhere and being nowhere, dragging along a bag in which she kept the dirty rag doll of her daughter's when she was a baby. When she could afford it, she clutched a bottle of wine. Her eyes looked pre-occupied all the time, as if she were pondering some weighty matter that

only she knew about.

I asked her what had happened to her daughter. "Boh", she said. A lock of grey, frazzled hair fell over her face and she brushed it away in what was once a girlish gesture. "C'est disparu". They were nomadic, transient folk the people in these soup kitchens: here one day, gone the next. Ghosts of the night: that was the expression many used. So it was with Marie That was the last I ever saw of her. One nameless day, she disappeared onto the streets, never to return.

For some time after that, during all the years you and I still meant something to each other, I thought many times that I might tell you this story. But I never did. It would be like destroying your home. Even in our bad moments. I felt your childhood was your ground. I felt I couldn't go there. Not even when you were saying spiteful things to me. And, in all the good times, I never mentioned it. What good would ever have come of it? It would only worry you.



The writer uses French words/phrases in his story. Given below is a list of these French words with English meanings for

readers' convenience.

- Chez nous (with us)
- comme les vagues (Like the waves)
- Viens, Cherie. C'est prêt, le repas. Ne le laisse pas refroidir (Come on, Honey. It's ready, the meal. Don't let it get cold)
- La dentelle (Lace)
- Putain(Whore)
- Alors. C'est l'heure de coucher (So its bedtime)
- C'est galère ou quoi (Is it a hassle or what)
- La réalité apres la fantaisie (reality after fantasy)
- C'est pas vrai (its not true)
- Cochon (pig)
- ma mere (my mother)

Silence

Taha Kehar - Pakistan

Woman killed by fiancé in Clifton

Our Correspondent

KARACHI: A woman was found dead in her apartment in Clifton on Friday morning. The victim has been identified as Sabina Riaz.

Police officials believe that Riaz had been reportedly gunned down by her fiancé Shehroz Zia. Neighbours saw him leave the apartment soon after the shots were fired. Some of them tried to prevent him from exiting the apartment complex, but he managed to flee.

The murder weapon was found on Riaz's desk next to a black notebook. A letter was tucked inside the book and is believed to have been written by the deceased a few hours before her death.

The police have refused to disclose the contents of the note, but SSP Waliullah Khan revealed it is a "vital piece of evidence" that will help them find Zia.

"From what I can tell, it isn't a suicide note," the SSP said. "If you read the note, it becomes clear that the victim seems to be disturbed, but is not suicidal. At this stage, it's also unclear what the motive was or what circumstances led to Riaz's murder. We'll know more once the investigation is complete."

Riaz was a journalist who worked for the Daily Image. Her friends and colleagues told the media that she was engaged to Zia, who was a struggling

dance choreographer and gym instructor.

"Shehroz wasn't a good man," said Aisha Shamim, Riaz's best friend. "He neglected her and exploited her. Shehroz was also financially dependent on her. The problem was that he only found work during winter when the wedding season is in full swing. Apart from that, he had quite a few disagreements with his family, which made things increasingly difficult for Sabina."

Alina Wasim, the victim's colleague, said Riaz never spoke much about her fiancé during work hours. "She did, however, mention that she needed to protect him from the world. How tragic that it was she who actually needed protection from him." Zia, who lived near Riaz's apartment, is missing and his number is switched off. His parents have declined to comment on the matter. Sharjeel, Zia's flatmate, told this reporter that Riaz's death comes as a tremendous shock to him.

"I don't know what happened between them," he said. "I can only sense it was something unpleasant. Shehroz spent every waking moment with Sabina. He only came home to sleep. I don't know what could have possibly gone wrong. It seemed like they were in love."

Dear S,

You once told me that you felt emotionally naked in front of me, as if your words performed a strip

striptease each time we met.

"I can see your bare chest," I quipped, the words rolling off my tongue with a playful ease. "Emotionally, of course."

Your thin mouth opened in a throaty guffaw, mere seconds after I made that joke. I wonder now if you saw through the sheen of sarcasm that disguised an amorphous love. Maybe you did. But I don't want to make any more assumptions.

For years, I've laboured under the illusion that I knew you better than anyone else did, that I saw in you what they couldn't see. I suppose I was wrong. I should have known each of us carries secrets in our heart.

I'm told that all of us have hidden rooms in our hearts that only those who we love can access. From the outset, you led me into empty rooms in your heart that you expected me to furnish, inhabit and swiftly vacate. I also opened the doors of my secret rooms for you, but didn't impose strict rules on exit or entry. Perturbed by the habit of loneliness, I took you into those sacred spaces in the earnest hope that you'd remain there for eternity.

I knew you wouldn't want to inhabit those rooms for long. Yet, I deluded myself with the fantasy of permanence. I should have kept these delusions in check. Companionship isn't just about letting people into these vacant corners of your life, but also depends on what they do once they find residence in your heart. When I realised this, it was too late to undo the damage you'd caused.

I can't write about you without context. I'll need to peel back the layers of our decade-long romance if I'm to justify your role in the story of my

destruction. How melodramatic, you might say. Why can't she save these drama-choked monologues for those unwanted stories she scribbles into her notebooks? I apologise for the melodrama, S. But I don't know any other way to tell our story. All I know is that I can no longer remain silent.

The truth is, our love was a calamity that came on the cusp of tragedy. I hadn't even recovered from my mother's death and my ex-husband's treachery when you returned to me.

Grief makes us perceptive; mine flung me into your embrace. The day I brought you home after that quiet dinner at Cafe Flo, my grief retreated into a dark chamber of my heart - the one you were scared to enter - and I accepted my new status as the lover who broke your silences. For seven hours, we sat in my drawing room and spoke about our triumphs and failures in love. In that long, soothing exchange, we carved out an affinity so chaste that nothing seemed to rival its intensity. That night, I allowed my thoughts to tread without caution and throw open the



bolted doors of an old passion.

I remembered our first meeting, which took place in the same drawing room where we were destined to meet again, several years later, and talk about love. My sister was getting married and you were teaching me the intricate steps of a dance I can't remember. I didn't dance as well as you did at the mehndi, but you were convinced that I was a star. My sister thought you were flirting with me and I'd simply brushed aside the thought, even though I was single then. Four days later, we had our first hug. Though an unusual feat to celebrate,

it was, for me, a quiet victory. I asked you to attend my sister's valima ceremony the following day. You didn't turn up and I tasted the tyranny of your first silence. It lasted a few months until I broke it with a confession over Facebook. I told you about Shoaib, my wily ex-lover who'd cheated on me. You told me something in exchange for that morsel of information. I forget what it was. The thrill of sharing confidences with you has left me with selective amnesia.

We didn't speak for another four years. I broke the silence again and suggested that we meet. You readily accepted my invitation, as if you were waiting for it for a long time. We met and the unspoken dialogue began. Your silences came and went, but I was much too preoccupied with the business of living to raise any objections about them. I made the mistake of marrying my ex-husband, Sameer, and soon became a caregiver to my ailing mother. In a cruel twist of fate, my mother's death coincided with my divorce.

When you returned after Sameer and my mother's departure (I see it now as a single stab-wound and nurse it as a collective pain.), your silences terrified me. I knew by then that I didn't have the courage to break them.

Mercifully, I didn't need to worry as the divine forces worked to my advantage. In a matter of months, our friendship morphed into an intimacy that knew no bounds. We'd finally eschewed those silences. The striptease began and you seduced me with the only part of you that I couldn't resist: your words. In your emotional nudity, you told me things that I shouldn't have heard, but cannot now dream of unhearing. A genial smile, a playful voice and the words you'd buried within your heart until now, unleashed an excitement I hadn't known before.

Our hearts, minds and bodies were immersed in a deep conversation that could never lose its momentum, its fevered rhythm. I should have walked away then.

The cracks weren't noticeable at first. The problems began with the occasional white lie - meaningless yet menacing - that grew into a painful

deception. And then came your long disappearance, which signalled the start of the most difficult phase of my life. When you finally returned, you said you were in trouble and that your parents had cut you off. For months, you extracted money from me under some pretext or the other. With each successive handout, I noticed a subtle yet significant shift in your demeanour.

I should have distanced myself from you when I realised how much of a liability you'd become. It was clear to me that your troubles were a product of your own inability to take initiative. But I was too vulnerable to walk away from you. In fact, I sought a peculiar comfort in taking care of you as that was one thing no one else did for you.

What have I got in return? Those tormenting, toxic silences have resurfaced over the last few months. You don't seem to care about their resurgence. You're happy as long as I continue to sponsor your extravagant lunches and shell out for bills that you should be working hard to clear.

I've been wanting to speak to you about this, perform my own emotional striptease. But I'm terrified of the consequences. What if I lose you to like I lost my mother and ex-husband?

Tonight will be different. I'm going to summon the strength to discuss the matter with you. The most dangerous battles we have to fight are in our minds. Once I've released my fear from the prison of my thoughts, it'll become easier for us to find a solution. Once our problems have been resolved, I'll burn this note and spread its ashes outside my window - a ritual of sorts to mark the end of a minor domestic disagreement.

Love,
Sabina

◆◆◆ About the Writer

Taha Kehar is a journalist, a literary critic and a novelist simultaneously. A law graduate from SOAS, London, Taha Kehar is the author of two novels, Typically Tanya and Of Rift and Rivalry. He is the co-editor of The Stained-Glass Window: Stories of the Pandemic from Pakistan

My dear Mitthoo

Sobia Kiran - Pakistan

I still remember the day, my beloved mother brought me a beautiful ring-necked parrot, Mian Mitthoo. Well, you may think that it is such a cliched name avoiding Western emphasis on individuality, but that fact of our culture is that such names like “chanda”, “gullu”, “lado”, “mano” and so many more are names of love like “darling”, “sweet-heart”, and “honey”. So, we did not endeavor to change the traditional name he shared with others of his kind in the pet shop and so many homes in Pakistan. Moreover, he was really “sweet”, metaphorically, by nature. He was cute, vigilant, intelligent, especially his eq (emotional quotient) was noteworthy. He was quick to win hearts with his adorable sounds and antics.

Soon, he became my buddy, my friend, and my playmate. Being the only child with no siblings, I had found a companion in this fluffy and feathery being. I would talk to him for hours in my free time. Even, while I was busy with my homework, he sat on my shoulder and observed me patiently. My mom and the maid would be amazed how he would fall asleep on my shoulder and would not like to go to his perch. He used to wait for my return from school impatiently in the veranda and shrieked in excitement as soon as he heard my salam. He would stay outside the washroom for me to come out and waited on me when I offered my prayer. He did not take food, while I was away; rather, he would wait and eat from my plate. He was on my shoulder, when I watched tv together or played with my friends never leaving me alone. My friends felt astonished to see that my Mitthoo did not live in the cage. I used to take him to the roof and courtyard too, but he would not fly. He was not “tota chasham” (disloyal), they would say, and I more than agreed with them and wondered,



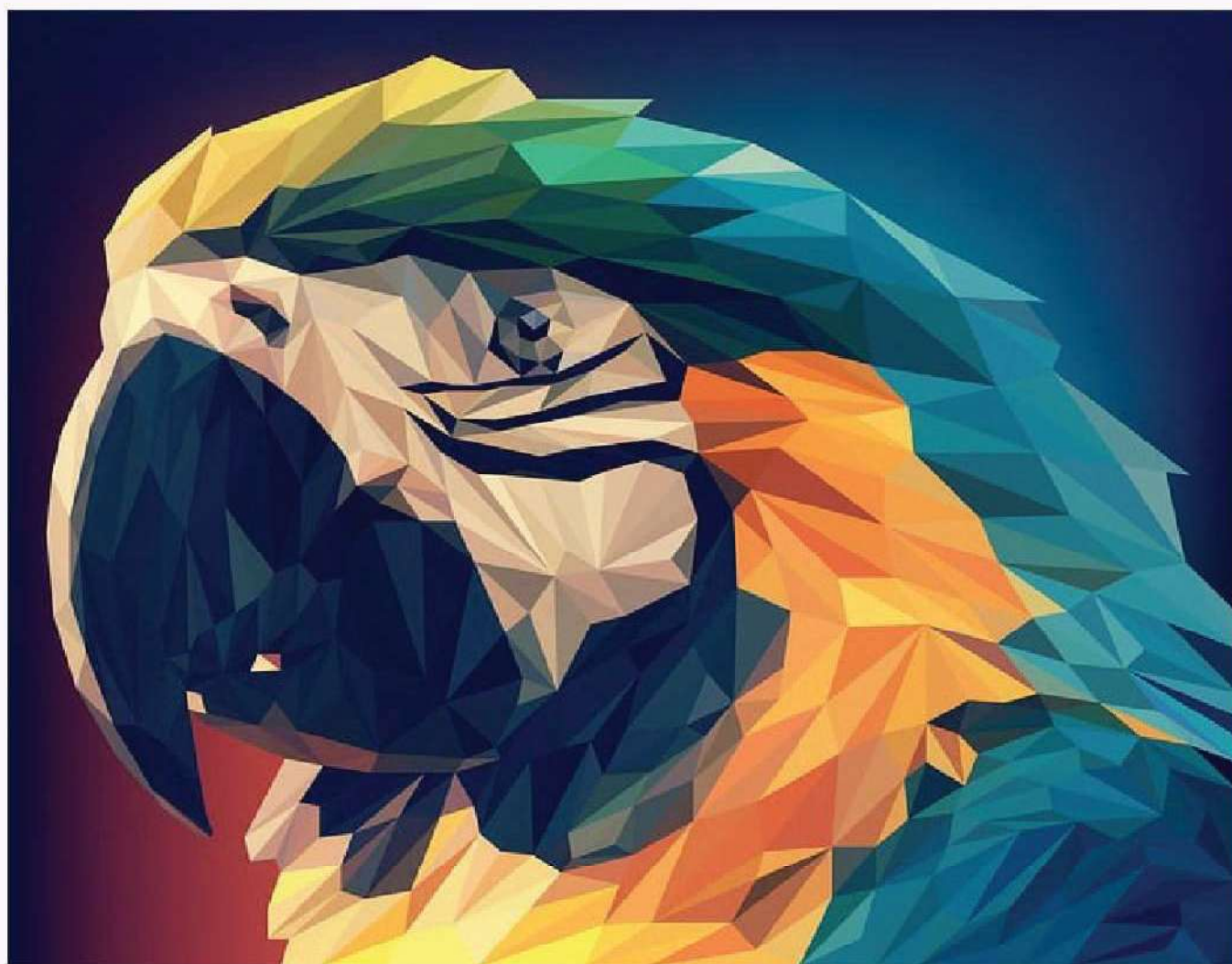
how we human beings love to blame innocent beings with our faults. I never clipped his feathers as advised by the pet shopkeeper or other pet lovers. I trusted him and he always kept my trust faithfully; actually, we human beings have a lot to learn from these birds. I would make him sit on the cloth line on the roof to enjoy cool breeze or rain. I would go inside to bring my piano or storybook, but he would patiently stay there waiting for me. Mitthoo had a great personality, a quite complex one with an ability to display a range of moods and behavior. He loved, fought, expressed jealousy, became angry, got annoyed, and became happy. If I ignored him, or would not share my food with him, he would get annoyed and would show his anger by not responding to me. I would call him several times endearingly with some treats to win him back. He did not like our maid and used to fly to the curtain rod when she was around. Also, neither did he like the strangers touching him, nor would he submit to the requests of the guests to pet him or have his highness on their arms. He would speak to me but would not even submit to such requests from my mom, which often made the home environment tense. Nonetheless, he followed his free will and took all such emotional decisions without caring for the people but me.

I came on the weekend, and his cheerfulness knew no bound. He welcomed me and would not leave me even for a moment not even during my sleep. He slept beside my bed, as if he was afraid that I would leave. Unfortunately, I had to leave with a very heavy heart and tears in my eyes. I used to come home every weekend, but this was not working with either Mitthoo or me. On the fourth weekend, when I came home, Mitthoo was not there. He had flown away, how? where? nobody had any answers. I wept so hard and took it to heart. I became sick and could not return to the college for a week. I used to sit on the roof in the hope that Mitthoo might return looking for me... Well, He did not, so I had to return to college, and life had to move on...



About the Writer

Sobia Kiran is a Ph.D. Humanities student at York University, Toronto, Canada. She is studying Pakistani science fiction comparing it with Western and Indian science fiction traditions. She uses interdisciplinary approach to discuss the mimicry and hybridity of Pakistani sf genre and its glocal themes. She holds M.A. English degree from York University. Previously, she has worked as an assistant professor of English in Forman Christian College University and Lahore College for Women University (on leave) in Pakistan. She has several scholarly publications to her credit. The details can be found on <https://lcwu.academia.edu/SKiran/Analytics/activity/documents>.



Welcome Home

Rohma Ahmed - Pakistan

The Seven Deadly Sins have been expelled from their world, and forced to roam the Earth in pursuit of one another. It is only when the seven will unite in a single lifetime, will they be able to return home.

They were destined to live over and over again until they found each other in one lifetime. Centuries had passed by and they were desperate to return home but for some reason, their lives never converged.

Greed and gluttony met in a casino. The loud music almost drowned the chorus of noises resonating in the place. The other side of the casino glittered red and blue as it was littered with dancing bodies too intoxicated to even stand straight while the opposite side divided by a single step was illuminated by bright golden lights making the casino chips twinkle and appear more valuable than they actually looked. Connor bet high and then higher while Ryke was just there for the food. He bet too, once in a while but watching back with an overflowing plate of seafood in front of him and watching as the men around him grew angrier as Connor kept winning, was more thrilling than participating himself. Ryke had been observing him for several weeks now and it was only today that he decided to bet on him because he had never once seen him lose. People playing with Connor didn't mirror his emotions though and Ryke wasn't sure how long the other had till one of them threw a punch and a fight broke out. He could see men furiously swearing under their breaths and glancing at Connor with fire burning in their eyes.

Ryke waited for Connor to leave for the bathroom before following him. He had bet on him and he deemed it important to warn the other of the threats looming over him. The bathroom was vacant and he crinkled his nose at the scent of sweat and vomit permeating the air. He went straight to the sinks where Connor was washing his hands and whistling leisurely, wondering how to start the conversation.

Their eyes met in the mirror and they nodded in acknowledgment before Ryke decided to begin the talk.

"You know, I think you should avoid coming here for a while. The men outside don't really appreciate you winning so much."

He closed the tap and leaned against the sink watching the other man. Connor sighed as if he was used to hearing this and just nodded with a tight smile, confidence dripping from his every single move.

"Yeah, thanks." He replied half-heartedly as he grabbed a few tissues and started to dry his hands when Ryke suddenly caught a flash of black on the underside of his wrist. He squinted and moved in

alarm towards the man and grabbed his wrist, baring the underside of it. Two overlapping arcs forming a semicircle met his eyes and his heart almost rose up to his throat, heartbeat loud in his ears.

“What are you doing?!” Connor snatched his wrist back, tugging the sleeve back over his mark.

“Avaritia?” Ryke whispered in disbelief, happiness bubbling up inside of him. Connor who has just turned the knob to leave the bathroom froze in his place, his back tense. He turned around to look at Ryke with uncertainty in his eyes. Ryke smiled before baring the side of his neck and letting Connor see the same mark engraved there.

Connor’s eyes widened before he clutched at his head and laughed hesitantly in bewilderment.

“Gula, is it you?” Connor asked, patting Ryke on his shoulder. His eyes shone with skepticism, still unsure how to react to finding one of the most important people in his existence.

“Yeah, my name’s Ryke this time.”

“You don’t look like a vessel for gluttony though.” Connor whistled, observing the thin frame of the other.

“Good metabolism, my friend.” Ryke shrugged, and their laughter echoed in the silence of the room.

Connor thought about all the lifetimes in which they had met before. The times they had spent desperately searching for each other and in some lifetimes when he’d been so tired, he didn’t even bother looking for anyone. The times when they had found each other except one of them and then realizing later that he had already died.

“It would be nice to go home finally.” Ryke said, longing etched on his face and Connor knew he

mirrored his expression. The ache to go home had dulled to a throb over the years as if fading to the background but without his knowledge, the pain had evolved into a never-ending muted suffering, always present but at the back of his mind.

“Yeah, it will be.”

Isaac had met Jamie when he was seventeen, he was twenty-two now. Jamie had tried stealing his wallet the first time they had met and he had slammed him against the wall punching him till his shirt was splattered with blood. The orange-haired male had smiled at him through it all, his blood-caked teeth stretched wide into a grin and it only infuriated him more.

He had formed a fist, the veins in his arms almost popping, and drew back his hand to deliver a harder punch when Jamie’s shirt rose up a little and the mark had flashed at him vividly, making him pause. He breathed heavily and stepped back, glaring at Envy who was still smiling at him as if they were the best of friends.

“Out of energy already?” Jamie had chuckled, spitting out blood and almost falling over from how dizzy he was. He looked confused as to why the other had stopped beating him to a pulp.

Isaac had chosen not to say anything and just pulled his jeans up to the knees to show him the mark matching his, relief replacing anger in an instant. Jamie’s eyes had widened for a second before the annoying smile made an appearance again but the softness in his eyes was enough for the other to know how genuinely happy he was.

“What’s your name?” Isaac asked, offering a hand to the other to pull him up. The other almost fell again because of how sweaty and bloody their hands were but he managed to stand up.

“Jamie. And yours? You’re Acedia, right? Sloth?” He asked, wincing at the soreness in his body and wiping the blood off his face. “You hit hard for someone who’s supposed to be slow.”

“Isaac.” He chose not to comment on the other statement.

They had been together since then, hoping to reunite with the others soon when one day Jamie brought a boy with him to the bar Isaac worked in, excitedly dragging him behind himself.

“Isaac, look who I found! Hubris! We had been playing games at the arcade for hours before I saw his mark on his hand.” Jamie grinned, gesturing to the boy beside him.

“Uh hi, I’m Raphael.” He was tall but skinny and he looked as if his body had grown too fast for him to catch up. His eyes were stuck to the floor, desperately avoiding eye contact as he chewed on his lip till the skin broke.

“Are you even legal to be here?” Isaac asks, convinced that the boy was no more than fifteen.

“I’m nineteen!”

“Yeah sure.” He was surprised to hear that but he suddenly remembered that one life time when he had his growth spurt earlier than the boys his age and people always commented on how old he looked so he kept quiet. It was the most annoying phase of all his lives. Jamie and Raphael spent the rest of the night playing games and Jamie lost almost all of them but he managed to steal the pocket knife Raphael kept in his jacket so he considered himself the victor.

Isaac had met Ryke once he had visited the bar at its twentieth anniversary to get free food. He had decided not to tell Jamie and Raphael until they had found at least one more of them or they would get too hopeful. He remembered the time six of

them had found each other but right before they found pride, wrath died. He also remembered the time when envy hadn’t been born in a lifetime at all and they had searched and searched endlessly for him.

Ryke told him that Connor and him had found Lust a few months back, a guy named Jace and he told him about Jamie and Raphael. Only one of them was left now and he tried his hardest to tamper down the hope rising inside of him. He cannot think of going back home. He cannot think of going back home. He will not.

Cortez still burned with anger as he looked at the bodies writhing on the floor in front of him. His body burned with exhaustion but he itched to beat someone who dared to challenge him to pulp. Too many people had been getting on his nerves lately.

“Are you done?” He heard a voice ask behind him. A tall man wearing an expensive suit stood at the end of the alley with two more men, watching him with amusement. The fire inside him started to sizzle brighter once more.

“Who are you?” He seethed, walking closer to them, the distant sound of horns blaring making his head ache.

“Can you bare your shoulder for us?” The man beside him, who looked like he was too tired to be here, asked.

“Excuse me?” Cortez expected anything but that and he had no idea why someone who he had never seen or met before would ask this of him.

“Come on, Ira. Stop being difficult.” The blond man said, stepping into his space and shrugging the collar of his shirt to the side to confirm the existence of the mark there. Cortez stopped breathing for a second as surprise washed over him.

“It’s you guys?” Cortez whispered, the fire inside him instantly burned out and was replaced with a sense of peace and comfort.

“I knew it was you the moment we heard talks about this guy beating anyone who crossed his path. They said he looked like he was the embodiment of wrath.” Connor laughed, slapping his back with glee. It hadn’t even been five minutes since they met but the air of familiarity around them tugged at Cortez’s heart.

After they had exchanged their human names, Cortez excitedly asked what other leads they had on the location of the other sins.

“We already found them. Only you were left.” Isaac told him, his hands twitching with excitement.

Cortez was appalled. They had never been in this situation before, when they had all found each other. He had no idea what to say so he just smiled warmly.

They had a party that night. All of them reveling in each other’s presence and marveling at the fact that they could go home this time. The room rang with the sound of laughter and glasses crinkling, the scent of their favourite foods lingered even after they had wiped out every single plate till it glittered, as good as new.

“Are you even legal to be drinking?” Cortez asked Raphael, who was drinking from a red cup laughing alongside everyone but at the comment, his expression turned offensive. Everyone started laughing at that as if they were used to hearing such remarks about him.

“I’m nineteen!” He screamed, making Jamie ruffle his hair and everyone shake their heads at him.

“Our proud fallen angel is a baby. Oh, how the mighty have fallen.” Isaac muses making Raphael

whine.

Connor watched them all with a smile on his face. They had always been together since the beginning of their creation and even on Earth they had spent lifetimes searching for each other. Finally, they were going to return home together too. He could only hope that this was their last lifetime looking for each other and the next time he saw them, they were home.

Connor is the last one to die, filling his role as their self-imposed leader.

Raphael was the first one to die, their youngest. He passed away in a car accident, staring up at the sky as the life left his body just a few days shy of his twentieth birthday. Jamie cried for a week straight.

Two years later, Isaac and Cortez were caught in a building which caught fire and burned to death. They had to wait for weeks for a confirmation of their identities because their bodies were too charred to be recognized. The funeral was a closed casket one.

Jamie and Jace vowed to enjoy every moment of their lives to forget the pain they had faced in the last two years. They attended every party, every gathering and every festival they found out about, losing themselves in the chaos of life.

Once while they were attending a car racing event late at night six months later, Jace got pushed in front of a speeding car by an enthusiastic crowd consisting of mostly intoxicated individuals, and died that instant.

Jamie stopped eating, stopped sleeping and passed out in a bath a week later, drowning to death.

Ryke who had been with Connor the longest, died of food poisoning ten years later in his bed.

Connor had buried all the others, and he was sure that they were successful this time.

When he dies, it's by accident. Someone drops a cigarette in the gas station while he is filling up his gas tank and the station blows up. The last thing he sees are his friends smiling at him.

When he wakes up again, he is home. Even though it had been centuries, he knew the place like the back of his hand. They all look exactly like they did when they died and Isaac holds out a hand for him, smiling. They looked as if they were waiting for him. Waiting for him to join them so they could cross the threshold together.

“Welcome home.”
He smiles back.

About the Writer

Rohma Ahmed is an aspiring English Literature graduate with a great interest in analyzing language, meaning and structure, from language in music and films to language used in daily life. Her creative work has been published in the university magazine at Kinnaird College for Women University and she has worked part of a team dedicated to editing and enhancing the technical writing in research books. She has a keen interest in resistance literature and exploring magic realism in a South Asian context.





Unraveling Love's Tapestry

Rukha Khalid - Pakistan

A 30-year-old scientist, Dr. Simon Williams, had been working for past 8 years to invent something that could help people to let their mind rest in peace. Something that could make them forget the portion of terrible memories from their pasts, so they would focus on making their present and future beautiful rather than finding themselves struck in past. He began working on it after he got divorced from his wife and she had the advantage of getting their 5-year old daughter's custody. He had been a wretched man after his divorce, being unable to focus on his work back then as an assistant to Dr. Parker

Infront of him, the machine named by him "Memory-Erase Device (MED)"

stood tall, housed within a sleek metallic casing. Its curved, polished surface reflected the promise of cutting-edge technology, while a vibrant display screen and minimalist controls conveyed an air of sophistication. Connected to the patient lying through ergonomic headsets and adorned with various cables, offering the potential to selectively

erase burdensome memories and pave the way for a new beginning.

"How much time would it take Doctor?" The young patient in her 20's; Anna Parker asked him. Simon's eyes looked up from his papers and right at her, answered a bit gravely, "It'll be done in no time"

This girl had been wishing to overlook the memories of being naive in the past, the friends she trusted had exploited her innocence turning her into a monstrous self of a drug addict.

Taking a deep breath, she closed her eyes hoping that she'd be beginning a new life after this treatment from Simon. Simon had been a quiet person for a while, with the aura of seriousness surrounding him, appearing as focused and mature as any scientist ought to be.

A month later, Anna had a chance of bumping in him again "Doctor! How's life going?" Simon looked at her dark red swollen eyes instead of giving her slurred voice much attention.

Before he could reply anything to her, A voice called her from behind, "Hey Ann, what are you doing there? Come on in, we got a new substance to rock ourselves too. Let me introduce you to another world!"

And Simon knew in a heartbeat the consequences of erasing bad memories. Erasing them means erasing all the bad experience that often shapes a monster into a good-natured, and healthy human being.

Anna had been a young, sweet, and shy girl whom he saw around more often than usual, being a daughter of his Senior Dr. Parker. Not so closely bonded to her father, she had made friends at work her little world. And that world had lured her into becoming a different version of herself. A version nobody could recognize anymore. From having a cute chubby face, she had gone on to become a lean figure of no less than a skeleton with little bit of skin over it and deep dark circles that surrounded her once big hazel brown eyes holding innocence in it.

Before Anna could go back in to that world of destruction, he took a hold of her hand softly but firmly. Upon feeling a soft protective hold, she looked down to find Simon clasping her hand in his. She looked back at him slowly, figuring out what he meant with that when she found herself already walking behind him while he took a lead of walking ahead and guiding a child through righteous path.

Two months passed in a go, Dr Parker organized a party on his cruise, a birthday celebration of Anna turning 22. Simon had been looking for her for an hour now, he had this deep desire of knowing how she had been doing lately, it's been a week since he

last saw her. That day he walked her to his Black Lamborghini, and to Dr. Stephanie's clinic. Therapies after therapies, and medication continued for a month, and he accompanied her to every single session. When he finally realized he had to tell Anna everything he knew of her past from her father. So, she could realize what deep pit of hell she was throwing herself again to after coming out of it with a lot of inner resilience and struggle on her own.

ut he felt the need to see her now, finding her standing at the back side of cruise, enjoying a cool breeze, he silently stood beside her. Without looking, she knew his presence was right there; Her Guardian Angel.

She had been doing better lately, with medication, and therapy sessions. Though they were put on hold a month back when Dr Stephanie told her, she had been a good patient trying to recover, and heal herself. So, Anna could visit her again if she felt relapsing but for now, the sessions could be put on hold with the continuation of medication for a while to help her withdrawals.

But he felt the need to see her now, finding her standing at the back side of cruise, enjoying a cool breeze, he silently stood beside her. Without looking, she knew his presence was right there; Her Guardian Angel.

Without turning to look at him, she said, "Hey Doc, how's life going?" she asked in her ever so soft voice. Simon, who had been a bit amazed at her sudden query and realizing she had been aware of his presence, was taken aback, and replied composing himself, "I should be the one asking you that. But at least this time, the question sounds sober" he remarked with a smirk at the end. Anna chuckled softly with eyes on the starry night, her straight, silky dark black hair blowing in to her white creamy face caressing her glowing, smooth skin. To Simon, she looked ethereal,

, he didn't have that feeling seeing a girl for years now.

"Thank you, for letting me know my past." She began speaking softly, shocking Simon. But he listened on without intervention. She continued "Memories, like brushstrokes on a canvas, compose the tapestry of our lives. Each stroke, be it light or dark, contributes to the beauty of our existence. For it is through the interplay of shadows and light that we find depth and meaning. Embracing our past, even the painful hues it may hold, allows us to appreciate the contrast and growth it brings. Like a phoenix, we rise from ashes, adorned with the wisdom of our journey... Remembering grants us the power to sculpt a future adorned with resilience and grace, transforming scars into artistry."

She took a pause and turned her posture towards him. Facing him now, maintaining what felt like a deep eye contact she said; "So, Thank You! For making the right decision at the right time, before he could drown himself again in that scary ocean from where there was no possible return this time around." Simon stared at her quietly with his expressions hardening and after a moment of deadly silence, said sternly "I'll never let you. I'll drown the damn world this time if I have to!" His words and cool breezy atmosphere withheld the silent connection, the unspoken desires, and the tender vulnerability in their locked eyes.



THE BRIDGE

The Bridge has launched a new feature

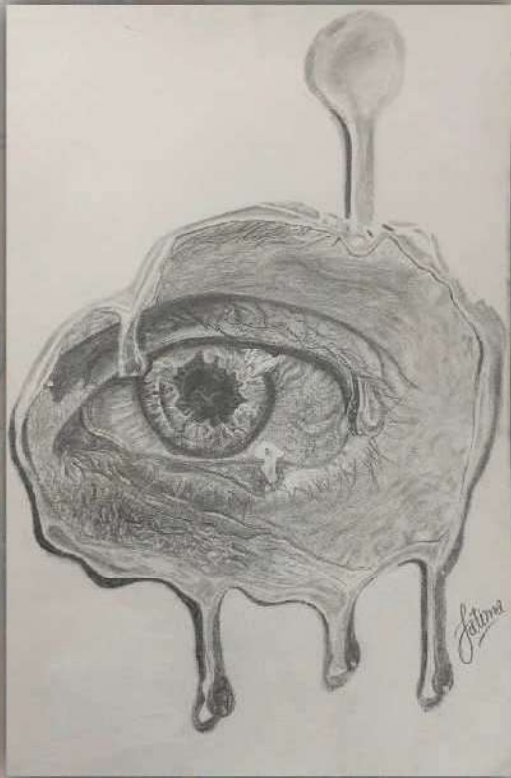
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The Misty Street

Fatima Irfan - Pakistan

After my complete day shift, I was tired so I rested a little. When I was going through my phone I got a message from an old pal who was angry with me as I had not seen her from a long time. She fought with me over the slightest things. Her name was Emily. Later after a week Emily messaged me that she was embarrassed and wanted to meet me

I replied that it was fine and invited her over to my place to have fun together. Soon after work, I grabbed some snacks from the convenience store near my house. It was a cold night. The streets seemed ghostly and silence prevailed everywhere.

While I was walking in the fog, a man appeared suddenly from nowhere and ran into me. He was wearing a black hat and a long brown coat. My snacks fell down so I bent down to pick them up. I couldn't even see the face of the man properly because of the frozen street lights and the thick fog around me.

I shouted "Hey mister, you should excuse !! But he ignored my scolding and rushed off. I could recognize the strange melody he was listening to. He smelled like a medicine that my grandmother usually gave me while I got sick.

Anyway I ignored him and quickly packed my snacks and went towards my home. But The door of my house was open. Emily must have left it open. I went inside and locked the door, put keys and stuff on the table and switched on the lights. When I looked at the floor, I got frozen for a few seconds and when I came back to my senses, I was screaming because Emily was on the floor, with a badly bleeding stomach. With my trembling hands I tried to check if she was alive.

I checked her pulse but didn't find any. I rushed to my phone and called an ambulance. After a few moments there was an ambulance, police, and Emily's family in front of my house. Emily was declared dead. The police started to investigate her case.

While looking at Emily with tears in my eyes I noticed something strange. I saw broken chunks of the same medicine given to me by my grandmother. Then suddenly that man from the street came to my mind. I tried to tell the police about that strange man but no one believed me because they suspected me for the murder. They took me with them and locked me up in the police station. Luckily, one of my prosecutor friends Rabeeca become incharge of this case. She asked me a lot of questions. I also told her about that strange man. So she started looking for evidences and interrogate others also in Emily's family.

On the trial day :

In court she showed the cctv footage of the convenience store-from where I got my snacks, the footage of camera near my house which showed a man who went towards my house and left before I entered into house. She also told that after long investigation they could not find that knife and it was not possible that I could go so far in such short time to hide the knife

At the second trial at court it was to be decided whether I was guilty or not. Me, my mother, and Rabeeca were extremely upset and confused.

But the decision was in my favour. I wasn't found guilty. My mother was relieved and tears rolled down her cheeks. She was utterly thankful to Rabeeca. But Emily's family was very disappointed as the murderer was still missing and they still doubted me. That night when I went home I was so scared to sleep. I kept remembering that man and I don't remember how and when I slept.

After three days my boss called me to come back at work for a prosecution job. I tried to come back in my normal life but I simply couldn't forget that incident. But one day I was going with Rabeeca for some personal work. We saw Emily's brother and when he looked at me he furiously come towards me, pushed me towards the wall and said "you killed my sister". You killed her because you had some issue with her. Rabeeca quickly pulled me by the arm and pushed the man away from me. Emily's brother said, "as long as no other culprit is found Sophia is the only one culprit who killed my sister". I said "No I did not and the police will soon catch the culprit and I will help them out in doing so". He didn't look convinced and said "ok let's see". After saying that he left. Rabeeca turned towards me, "Sophia are you serious? Just ignore him, we know that you are not the culprit."

I replied "no, I want to show them it wasn't me. I will put every effort to find the murderer."

"Then please don't do anything in rush I will help you."

The very next day we both decided to walk separately at nights and find some evidences. One day at night I felt like a man was standing on the corner of the street and staring at me. I could see his shadow. I ran towards him. But when I reached the spot, no one was standing there. I looked around but couldn't find anyone. The next day I asked some questions from the people living around. A few of them had also seen a strange man roaming at the streets but didn't know who he was.

During my investigation, I reached the house of a young man. He invited me to his house. His wife gave me water. Then I asked him about the man who walks on the streets at night. He said he didn't know about that man but told me some hidden areas around this area.

He told me that it was possible that some people lived in that area. He also told that his name was William, and if I needed any I could contact him again. I thanked him and left.

The desire to catch that man was burning inside.

Rabeeca and I headed towards those hidden area the next morning to explore an old house where no one lived and I went to explore a closed amusement park. We both went to our ways according to our plans. When I reached there at night, no one could know I sneaked in that amusement park. That place was quite old. I entered the office straight away. It seemed as if someone was living there from a long time. There were some food stuff and some clothes. Meanwhile I saw a hat and an umbrella. Then I tried to find that long coat in his wardrobe. Just then I heard someone was coming in.

Immediately I hid myself in his wardrobe. A man came in. I was peeking out from between the clothes. He put some of his food stuff on the table and went towards the restroom. I left that place immediately because I felt insecure. I went to see Rabeeca and she was sitting anxiously. She told me she had seen a strange incident. I anxiously asked what she saw and she said "I didn't find anything in that house but on my way back, I saw a crowd of people standing, ambulance and police were also there. When I went there and asked, a man had been killed in his house. He was also stabbed in his stomach. I think his murderer is the same who murdered Emily. Now tell me what you saw?" I told her about that man I saw today in the amusement park is the murderer who killed that man. We also doubted that man for murder of Emily. But we

couldn't say anything until we had some proof. The next day we went to William's house. After we knocked for 15 minutes his wife opened the door. She took us both inside and remained silent all the time until William came in. We asked him some questions about that amusement park man. He said that he didn't really know in detail about that man, but the rumours said that man used to work at that amusement park since long and when the park was closed he became mentally disturbed. He still walks around and recommends that the park should be reopened. Perhaps his name is Thomas. That's all he knew. We thanked him and left. Then we decided to install some hidden cameras at some points without letting anyone know.

We used to check the footage everyday. One day I wasn't feeling well, so I asked Rabeeca to check the footage and I went out for a walk. It was night so the streets were empty. Suddenly I heard the same melody which I heard that night when Emily was murdered. I reached on the next street while listening to the melody. I saw a man with the coat and hat listening to that melody. He had a knife in his hand and was stabbing an old woman. I was so sure that he's the man I saw that night when Emily was murdered and suddenly my phone started ringing. That man immediately looked back towards me. When I saw his face my hands started shivering and my heart was pounding very fast. He was William. William had a knife in his hand and ran towards me. I screamed out loudly. I tried to run away but he grabbed me and pressed my neck forcefully. It was so hard for me to breath. He said "how dare you try to catch me". At the same time Thomas came and pushed William away from me. He asked me if I was okay. I was breathing heavily. Thomas tried to protect me but William stabbed him on his hand and pushed him to the ground. William came towards me with the cruel smile. But, right at that time Rabeeca reached there with the police. William tried to escape but police caught him. I was wondering how badly I had misjudged Thomas and trusted on William's words and if Thomas hadn't come today, William would

have killed me. Rabeeca ran towards me and asked, "Are you ok? You are hurt? Right! I asked "how did you know, I was here?" She said " Did you forget that we installed a camera here? When you were standing on the side of the street for a while I was watching you that's why I called you . But when I saw a man attacking you after I called you, I immediately reached there with the police. But I am so surprised to see William as a stalker. But who is this wounded man who saved you? I told her it was Thomas who saved my life. She said "Ohh! What seriously? We took both of them wrong". After capturing William I became the prosecutor in-charge of that case. I asked him why he killed that old woman and he remained silent. Then I asked "are you the one who killed that old lady?" He didn't answer again. Then I asked "are you the one who killed Emily?" He looked at me with a smile and said "yes! I killed that old lady and a man. But do you have any evidence that I killed Emily?" I replied that "you would never know what can I do with you". After that I left.

In court William looked so confident and was staring at me with a cruel smile. His lawyer explained everything in his favour. I told that I witnessed this man when he killed that old woman. I showed them the cctv footage of my hidden camera when he attacked me and Thomas. Then I asked permission to call a witness. When my witness came in, William was stunned. My witness was William's wife "Anna". William said in loud voice that "Anna what are you doing here? Go back now". The judge ordered him to keep quiet and called witness inside.

I started asking questions from Anna.

I asked her that "Do you know William has killed how many people?"

She said, "Yes! 6 people. Ever since I got married to him, he killed 4 people in that area and two in the country side. I don't know how many people he has killed before my marriage."

I asked her if she knew who were the four people who had been killed in that area.

Anna replied, "yes! Your friend, an old lady, a man and forth one is a man who lived on the backside of our house. William killed him in his basement that's why his body is not found yet".

I asked, "Do you know why he kills people?"

Anna said, "He's a psychopath. He likes to kill people while listening to a strange melody.

I sighed. My next question was obvious. Why didn't she report all this to the police all this time. She said, "I have tried twice. But I was caught by him. He beat me a lot and always warned me that he would kill my brothers too. That's why I was forced but this time when prosecutor Sophia encouraged me, I couldn't keep quite."

William's lawyer stood up and asked "Do you have any evidence? That he murdered six people?"

Anna nodded.

The six knives which were used to stab the six different people and the DNA test of the six Dead bodies and the DNA of William's fingerprints got matched too!

In anger William told the truth and started shouting "I will kill you too Anna , your brother and will destroy your family".

William was pulled out by the police. The judge decided to announce the decision after half an hour's break . That time felt like a decade to me. I was a little anxious and scared but pretended to be ok.

William was found guilty so according to law he was sentenced to death.

The relief filled my eyes with tears . Finally I proved to everyone and the real culprit was behind bars . Rabeeca and Anna were also happy .

Then the other day Emily’s family also apologized to me for their behaviors.

And this justice put a smile back to Emily’s mother that the real culprit was caught.

His brother said in tears : I know I should not be forgiven but still try to forgive me once”.

“It’s ofcourse through your aspect I was the suspect but fortunately it wasn’t me but still I forgive you”, and Emily’s mother hugged me instantly . The burden was off my shoulders.



About the Writer

Fatima Irfan is an aspiring and emerging young writer and artist based in Faisalabad. Pencil sketching has always been her forte. She is interested in drawing the deep side of human philosophy and her aim is to make her own night exhibitions of her sketching and paintings.





Close Calls and Heroic Feats

Asfa Iman - Pakistan

In the third grade, I was a scrappy little thing, running around with my friends, playing a game of "unch neech ka pahar" in schoolyard, which in English translates to 'mountain of highs and lows'. The rules were simple: you had to be on a higher surface than the ground and keep switching spots to win against the rival team. If the member of rival team grabbed you while you were on low ground, you would lose. We were crushing it, until one of my dear friends got stuck in the same spot for an agonizingly long time.

I could feel her frustration mounting, and it sparked a sense of empathy in me. I knew I had to do something, to distract the other team, to give my friend a chance to break free. So, I made a run for it, charging towards another high point, but in my haste, I didn't see a random student running towards me. We collided and fell, my head slamming onto a sharp stone that was lurking on the ground.

As I fell to the ground, I felt a searing pain in my head. Blood began to pour out of the wound like a crimson river, flowing down my face and soaking my clothes. The metallic tang of blood filled my nostrils as I struggled to stay conscious. The

warmth of the blood mixed with the cool air around me, creating an eerie sensation. The sight of my own blood was both terrifying and fascinating at the same time. I felt like I was in a horror movie, a victim of a gruesome accident. My vision started to blur and I could hear my friends screaming and shouting. It felt like I was drowning in a sea of red and I blacked out for a moment.

When I came to my senses, I was still there, dazed and confused. My friends were in a frenzy, and my teacher rushed to my side, her face etched with concern. "Are you okay? Are you hurt?" she asked, her voice trembling with worry. I must have looked like a bloody mess, but strangely, I wasn't feeling the pain on my head where the major injury was. Instead, I pointed to my elbow, which was only slightly injured. It was like that moment in life where the small things cause more pain than the big ones. Here I was, with blood gushing out of my head like a broken faucet, and all I could think about was the twinge in my elbow. Talk about priorities, am I right?

She whisked me to the hospital. The doctor cut my hair at the point of injury, cleaned the wound and put stiches and band-aid on it. To help replenish my lost blood, he gave me some energy syrups.

As I sit here typing this memory, I can't help but wonder why I've always been iron deficient. And then it hits me like a ton of bricks - this incident! Well, that explains a lot. I guess I should thank that collision for giving me an excuse to eat more spinach and red meat. Who knew a childhood accident would have such a lasting impact on my iron levels?

As for my bald spot, it's a 'badge of honor', a reminder of the 'heroic deed' I once did for my friend. Even though looking back now, it might seem like a silly little game, for us, in that moment, it was a matter of life and death. And even though I may have gotten a little banged up in the process, I wouldn't change a thing. After all, it's these close calls that make us appreciate life just a little bit more.



The Beautiful Curse

Gull Javed -Pakistan

She does not understand what's wrong with her. She is suffering from a disease no one can cure. She can't even decide if its her who is sick or if the other people are going crazy. Everyday, her identity becomes a question for her. The person she sees in the mirror is different from the description that people give her about her. She can't decide if its some super natural power or a curse. Mila is going through the strange things. She recalls the day when its all started. One day when she was sleeping, she saw a dream. A person was giving her an a red juicy apple. She ate that apple and the person disappeared. That day when she woke up she felt something fishy but everything felt normal. It was her first day of school. she went to school excitedly but all day, strange things happened to her. A boy told her to become friends as he liked her blue eyes. But Milla's eyes are brown. She told him but he got annoyed and went away. Her new friend Tina complemented her curly hair. She was again shocked as she had straight hair. Somebody called her black hair, blond. The people would call her what she was not. When she told this to her parents they ensured that she looked just like she is, and described her features. And whatever they told her was same as she sees herself in the mirror. This made her realize that people would see her according to their taste. As their favorite person, the person they day dreamed about. If a person likes blue eyes, Milly's eyes will appear blue to him. If someone likes curly hair, her hair will appear curly to them. It may be due to the apple she ate in her dream. At first it was traumatizing for her. She went into mental breakdowns and identity crises. But as the year passed she got used to it.



Now when she is twenty, this thing does not bother her that much. Sometimes she also enjoys this thing. She asks people to describe her to know about what they like and feels joy on this secret power. One day she met Ryle in the guitar class. He was tall, with chestnut brown curly hair. He had a tattoo of the “Arctic monkeys” on his neck. She asked him about Arctic Monkeys and they both started talking. They had similar interests. They both loved to play guitar, board skating and reading books. Eventually they started dating. One day, when they were having dinner date. She asked Ryle to describe her. He laughed “Mila! Are you kidding me?”. “Ryle please tell me, its important for me”. “You know what, I love this goofiness of yours Mila”. “So now listen after that you might fall in love with your self”. He laughed. She also smiled nervously. He took a tissue and started playing with it while looking down “Your honey warm eyes have melting abilities. They can melt glaciers with their passion. Your sleek jet black locks when fall on your face , it feels like the moon is trying to peek from the dark clouds to give it’s admirer a relief. Your thin red lips are the taste of red wine that an Italian may drink in distress, in the bar at midnight. Your determinism, your passion to become the best version of your self makes me falls in love with you. You can become a perfect mother to my children. Mila! Will you marry me?” he had made a paper ring from the tissue by now. He looked up at Mila with hope in his eyes and a

smile on his lips. Mila was crying. Her tears were falling on her rose cheeks. And she offered her hand to Ryle while smiling with tears “I love you Ryle! You can see through me. You love me as I am”. He put the tissue ring in her finger. He described her as she really was. She was the dream girl of Ryle’s imagination in real life. She had found her soulmate.



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About the Writer

Gull Javed is a young and enthusiastic fiction writer from Pakistan. She utilizes her deep observation for creation of philosophical ideas in her stories.





The Invisible Child

Hina Inayat

Pakistan

Sarah was a quiet and shy child who often felt overlooked and ignored by those around her. But little did she know, she had a special power that would change her life forever. She could turn invisible.

At first, Sarah thought it was just her imagination playing tricks on her. But after a few experiments, she realized that she could control her visibility. She could make herself disappear whenever she wanted.

In the beginning, Sarah was thrilled by her new power. She would sneak up on her friends and family, surprising them by suddenly appearing out of nowhere. But soon, she realized that her power could be used for more than just fun and games.

Sarah began using her invisibility to help people in need. She would sneak into hospitals and visit sick children, making them laugh and forget about their pain for a while. She would also sneak into stores and steal food and supplies for homeless people, leaving them on their doorsteps without anyone knowing where they came from.

But Sarah soon realized that her powers were not without consequences. As she became more daring, she attracted the attention of some dangerous people who wanted to use her power for their own gain.

One day, Sarah was caught by a group of thieves who wanted her to steal valuable items for them. She knew she had to use her powers to escape, but she was terrified. She had never been in a situation like this before.

Sarah closed her eyes and focused on her power. She felt herself becoming invisible, and she slipped away from the thieves without a sound. She ran as fast as she could, her heart pounding in her chest, until she was far away from danger.

After that day, Sarah realized that her power was not just a fun trick. It was a responsibility. She continued to use her powers for good, but she was more careful and cautious than ever before.

Sarah's invisibility had given her a new perspective on life. She realized that sometimes, the most important things in life were the things that couldn't be seen. And she was determined to make a difference in the world, whether she was visible or not.





The Library Book

Hina Inayat

Sophie loved going to the library. She loved the smell of old books and the quiet atmosphere that enveloped the place. She would spend hours browsing the shelves, looking for the perfect book to read.

One day, as she was scanning the shelves, a book caught her eye. It was an old, leather-bound book with a faded gold title. The book was called "The Timekeeper's Daughter".

Sophie checked out the book and brought it home. As she opened it, a small piece of paper fell out. It was a handwritten note that read: "If you are reading this, you are the chosen one. Follow the instructions inside to unlock the secret of the timekeeper's daughter."

Sophie was intrigued. She flipped through the pages of the book and found a series of instructions

scribbled in the margins. The instructions led her to an old oak tree in the park. Sophie followed the directions and found a small key hidden in a knot in the tree's trunk.

Excitedly, Sophie ran back home and searched for the lock that the key belonged to. She eventually found an old chest that had been in her family for generations. She put the key in the lock, and with a click, the chest opened.

Inside, she found a map and a letter. The letter was written by her great-great-grandfather, who had been a timekeeper. He had hidden the book and the key to ensure that the timekeeper's legacy would continue.

The map led Sophie to a hidden room in the library, where she discovered a time machine. She climbed into the machine and set the date to the year 1900. As she traveled back in time, she saw the world change around her. When she arrived, she saw her great-great-grandfather, who greeted her warmly and showed her the ropes of timekeeping.

Sophie spent several months in the past, learning about the history of her family and the importance of timekeeping. When it was time to return to the present, she bid farewell to her great-great-grandfather and promised to carry on his legacy.

As she stepped out of the time machine and back into the library, Sophie realized that she had been given a special gift. She had discovered a family secret and had been able to travel through time. And it had all started with a simple book she had picked up at the library.

About the Writer

Hina Inayat is currently studying Literature in a Public Sector University in Pakistan. She is interested in the exploration of human psyche and the world around her.



Someone Came to Life

Rabail Saeed - Pakistan

The sun took away all the light with it and leaves that small alley in darkness. Some sparks of shine are given by the small fireflies. The broken street lights, and a foul smell of garbage was depicting the status of the people living in that alley. They all belonged to the beggar class of that society, the lowers of the lowest class. This narrow alley opened up on a small road. A small road was shining in the working street lights and therefore one could see a figure walking in a slow tread on this road. When he passed below the street light, his appearance was made much visible that one could see his finest clothing and a breathtaking aura around him. He was wearing a white colored long shirt touching almost his feet and his feet, shining in the night even as if a star was shining under his skin. The same was the condition of his hands. Long, slender fingers, and soft palms giving a sign

that whatever he will touch will turn into soft-stuff like his hands. There was a Ruby embellished ring on the middle finger of the right hand. His clothes were giving a strong, sweet-smelling fragrance that he was leaving behind. His face was not shown as he was walking with his head down to the point that his chin was touching his neck. Another reason for his hidden face was a white fine triangle-shaped cloth covering his hair which was very loosely spread on his head that it covered his head and shoulders.

The figure reached that dark, narrow, and smelly alley at which no one wanted to turn their face. He turned his face towards that alley and held his head up. But, his face was still not visible because the alley was too dark. He started walking in that street. His tread showed that he had perfectly no problem with the awful, bad smell of this alley. He continued his walk until he reached the end of the alley on the door of a small space container kind of a room. The container had rusted iron on its outer side, written: "If you can give a loaf of bread".

A disposable plastic plate was thrown by someone on this door which had a half-eaten piece of meat in it. This piece was being eaten by a cat right now. Probably, the first half was eaten by the resident of the container and the second half was donated to the cat. A donation upon donation.

The figure knocked on the door very softly, continuously until the door got opened. With a small torch in his hand, a life came out. The torch illuminated the space between the two. Now, both figures could be seen clearly. One with the finest clothes and the other standing inside the door with an oversized, cheap, torn shirt touching almost his feet. The feet of the one standing inside the door were dirty and gave a notion that he had not washed himself up for more than a week. His body was weak and bent like a 70-year-old man. His hands were in the same condition as his feet. his face

showing the best example of the poorest people. but...

Seeing a well-suited gentleman on his door, his expressionless face got startled. He had not seen a more handsome man than the one standing in front of him, on his door. He stood in awe looking at the shining face of the man. He looked like he belonged to the high-class society of his country but how come such a high profile man reach at his door? 'Might be here to give donations'. The Old man said to himself. The poor man took himself

out of shock and asked the man, "Who are you?"

"I came to take you with me." He gave the reply in a smiling, soft voice. No one smiled at him for many years. Everyone made a nauseous face at him.

"Who are you?" the old man inquired again.

"You are no longer going to suffer". This time warm and softer voice.

"I am asking, who are you?" The old man asked, this time with pressure, fear, and hope.

"Your Afterlife!" and the old man fell on the floor, dead.





The Late Pick-up

Narjis Raza - Pakistan

As I look back on that day, it brings back fond memories of my childhood. It was a normal day, just like any other day, when my elder sister Rubab and I went to school. We were both students at Dar-e-Arqam school, and I was in class 2 while Rubab was in class 4. Going to school was always fun for me, especially when I had my sister by my side.

It was a hot summer day, and after completing our work, we got busy playing with our friends. We didn't get picked up for a long time, which was unusual for us, as our father used to take us to school and back. But we didn't worry too much about it and continued playing.

It was then that someone called out that someone had come to pick up Rubab and Narjis. We rushed to the window, hoping to see our father's car, but it wasn't there. We looked again, and still, there

was no sign of our father or his car. This happened a couple of times, and we began to wonder what was going on.

Finally, a familiar face appeared below, our farmer, who used to work in our fields and accompany our father as a driver. He beckoned us to come down and explained that our father had to go somewhere suddenly, so he called him and asked him to pick us up. But at that time, he was here in the city to get some tractor work done. So, he had to come and pick us up on a tractor. This was very unusual not because we never sat on a tractor. We enjoyed riding tractor but there's a difference between riding a tractor in our fields and to travel on a tractor in front of the whole city.

As we walked down, I began to feel uneasy about riding on the tractor in front of everyone. I called my father and expressed my concerns to him, but



sister also whispered to me, encouraging me to let go of my fear and trust our father.

I reluctantly sat on the tractor, feeling self-conscious and embarrassed. But as we rode along, the weather suddenly changed, and a cool breeze began to blow. The sky became covered with clouds, and the whole atmosphere became pleasant. I forgot all my worries and started to enjoy the ride.

We chatted and laughed all the way home, and when we finally arrived, I put on my usual fake embarrassment. But my mother explained to me that it doesn't matter what people say or think, as long as I'm happy. I realized that day that I should ignore what people say and focus on my own happiness.

Looking back on that day, it may seem insignificant, but it taught me a valuable lesson. It taught me to let go of my fear and trust in my family, and it taught me that my happiness is more important

than what others think of me. It's a memory that I will cherish forever, and one that has helped shape me into the person I am today.

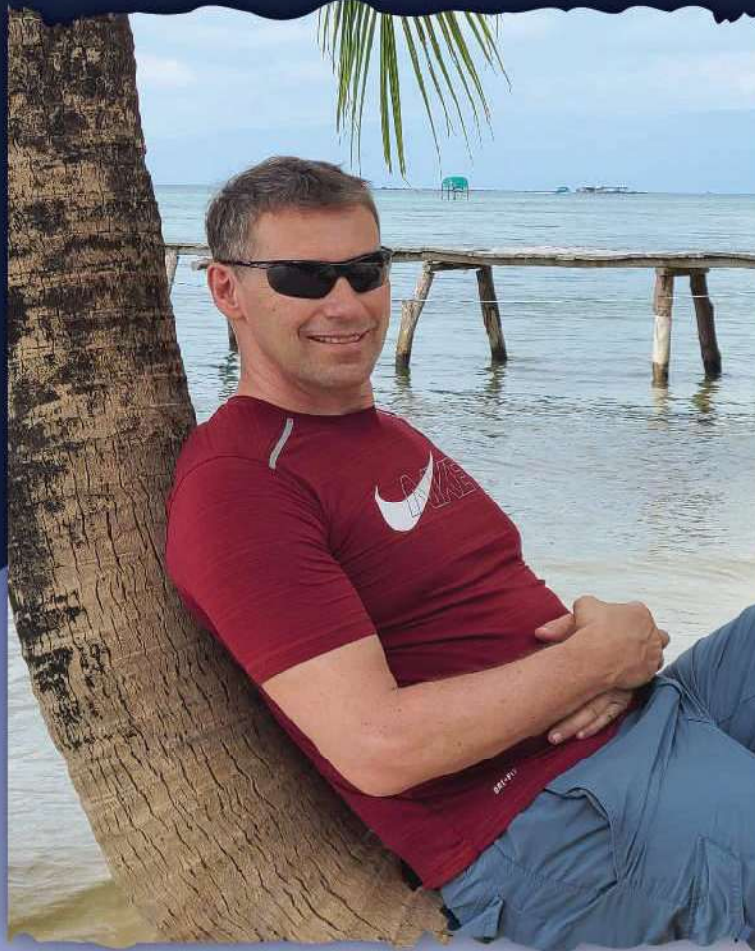
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About the Writer

Narjis Raza is a passionate emerging writer based in Lahore, Pakistan. Her work mostly deals with the topics concerning the natural world around her.



Dieter Bruhn



Dieter Bruhn is an international leader, educator, entrepreneur, and cultural ambassador who has conducted dynamic and engaging training programs all over the world. He is President and Founder of One World Training, a global training organization based in Boulder, Colorado in the United States. With Master's degrees in both TESOL (Teaching English as a Second Language) and Language & International Trade, he has a strong background in both teaching and business. He is an accomplished poet and songwriter who is passionate about helping teachers and students across the globe develop a love for creative writing.



Dieter Bruhn

An Epitome of Creative Genius!

By Christa Bruhn, author of the memoir
"Crossing Borders: The Search for Dignity in Palestine"

It is my honor to write about the featured poet Dieter Bruhn in this issue of the Bridge E-Magazine. I have the privilege of knowing Dieter not only as a writer and poet, but as my brother. Growing up in Staten Island, New York and Detroit, Michigan, we would practice writing with our opposite hands, perhaps our first experience of trying to understand the world through the other's perspective since I was left-handed, and he was right-handed.

I always knew I wanted to be a writer, but Dieter very early on proved his prowess at poetry, writing a daily Morning Poem with friends for their homeroom teacher in eighth grade, winning second place in a poetry contest in high school, and crafting catchy rhymes for birthdays and other special occasions. When I turned eight, Dieter wrote me a card he made himself. He cut out the number '8' from tin foil and glued in on a folded piece of paper like a mirror and wrote inside, "Today you're 8 and 8 is great!"



As the offspring of an American mother and German father, we grew up with a mixture of American and German language and culture laced with occasional travel to Europe. We understood that there were different ways of looking at the world, that there are other worlds beyond our cultural context. Our father was passionate about the arts and delighted in exploring other cultures. We inherited that passion, venturing off in our own ways to explore other parts of the world. As Dieter wrote in his poem "Mirror, Mirror" during one of our many meetings on Zoom to write together:

I took the path that others left,
Where only few would roam,
Not knowing always where I'd land,
Or what I would call home.

Once following our respective junior year abroad to study in Germany, we traveled to Israel and Palestine together with only a few words of Arabic. We both learned how to connect with people through gestures and facial expressions, pick up on people's emotions without words. We also learned the power of knowing even a few words in someone else's language, how a simple "hello" or "thank you" can serve as an outstretched hand to touch someone's heart. Thirty years later, we traveled to Standing Rock Indian Reservation in solidarity with the Water Protectors who were trying to stop the Dakota Access Pipeline known as the "Black Snake" from posing a risk to the water supply of the Lakota Sioux Nation. Showing up to stand up for Standing Rock was a simple yet greatly appreciated gesture, the language of humanity.



Besides a talented poet, Dieter is quite the musician. He has written his own songs while playing his guitar, and even composes songs on the fly for friends and strangers alike. His songs sung from his soul always turn strangers into friends by connecting people through the heartstrings of humanity. At Standing Rock, Dieter led us all in song at “Grandma’s Kitchen,” our home base among the Hoopa Nation at the Oceti Sakowin Camp, inviting us each to make up rounds of lyrics, then join in a chorus of “Grandma makes the best food around.” Through word and song, we became one community, though we came there from all corners of the earth.

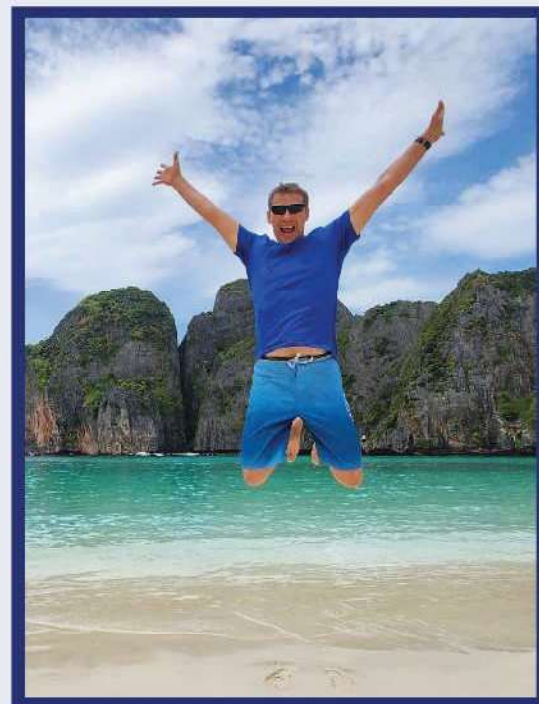
Dieter has given presentations on Creative Writing at conferences, and together with friend Patrick T. Randolph, won the “Best of CoTESOL” for the best presentation at the Colorado TESOL Convention for their workshop entitled, “Creative Writing as a Springboard to Academic Writing.” Dieter’s creativity and natural ability to connect with strangers is part of what makes him so successful in his company One World Training through which he conducts teacher training, cross-cultural training, and business communications training all around the world. This work has included certifying

hundreds of teachers in Teaching English as a Foreign Language as well as training women entrepreneurs throughout Northeast India.



Having traveled to at least 40 countries, including Vietnam, Thailand, Cambodia, Myanmar, Pakistan, India, Indonesia, South Korea, Japan, Mexico, Argentina, Brazil, Costa Rica, the Philippines, Tunisia, and Senegal, there is

no place on earth Dieter doesn’t bring a smile to people’s faces and inspire them to take their professional pursuits to the next level. Admired as a teacher, respected as a human being, Dieter’s easy-going style and approachable demeanor make learning fearless fun. Long after Dieter has left a teaching assignment, his students stay connected like family.



During the Covid pandemic, Dieter took an assignment sponsored by the US Embassy in Hanoi, Vietnam, complete with the two-week quarantine to be able to enter the country. His assignment was repeatedly extended because of the tremendous value he added to that cultural context through his custom designed workshops and training programs. Even in a distant land, Dieter finds himself at home and among friends, adding new cultural traditions to his repertoire of ways of being.

Besides this cornerstone of connecting across cultures, Dieter maintains an athletic lifestyle with regular exercise and by participating in numerous competitions from Ironman to Oceanman and everything in between. Most recently, Dieter won his age group at a sprint triathlon in Vietnam and got third place in his age group at a 10k ocean swim in Thailand. On or off the field—or the dance floor with his participation in dance classes and competitions in Salsa, Bachata, and Zouk, Dieter is full of life and laughter in song, word, and deed. Who knows? Maybe his very next poem, or song, will be for you.



Shattered Wings

Dieter Bruhn - USA

With two shattered wings,
I try and I try,
But whatever I do
I'm not able to fly.

The sun's warmth invites me
To soar toward her glow,
But instead I am stuck here
With nowhere to go.

The clouds they are calling;
The breeze speaks to me.
My heart and my soul,
They both want to be free.

Away from the city
With noise all around,
Instead in the heavens,
Far from the ground.

But without my wings
There's not much I can do,
So I'm calling for help
As I'm searching for you.

To put me together
With the love that you bring,
And then, till forever,
For you I shall sing.



Masks

Dieter Bruhn - USA

Every year on Halloween
I have a simple task,
To choose a costume to be worn
And also choose a mask.

So once a year I'm not myself,
A character I play,
Then pack my costume up again
To use another day.

But then I think of life itself,
What other masks I've worn,
What characters inside of me
Over time were born.

The happy face I wear sometimes,
To hide when I feel sad,
Not wanting other's sympathy
Or to make them too feel bad.

And what about the serious look
I carry when I must;
Although I want to laugh and play,
At times, this mask, I trust.

And then that mask that always says
What others want to hear;
As not to disappoint their hearts,
It's golden to their ear.

Not wanting to get mad sometimes,
The mask I wear will smile;
As others marvel that I'm calm,
They long to share my style.

Yet what I've found most powerful
Is to simply say what's true,
And that the masks I've worn in life
Don't help with things I do.

So moving forward on this path,
I pack them one by one;
And now, except on Halloween,
I know their work is done.

Mirror, Mirror on the Wall

Dieter Bruhn - USA

Mirror, mirror on the wall,
Tell me what you see.
As I reflect upon my life,
Please take a look at me.

I still feel young, yet looking hard,
My wrinkles start to grow.
Am I now a wiser man?
Tell me what you know.

I've traveled far across the globe
To countries far away;
My heart a book of memories
I'm still writing to this day.

What have I learned from all these trips
And people I have met?
What still lies ahead of me?
What tales can I still get?

Oh mirror, as I look at you,
I know you can see me.
Have I chosen well in life?
Is this where I'm meant to be?

I took the path that others left,
Where only few would roam,
Not knowing always where I'd land,
Or what I would call home.

So mirror, mirror on the wall,
I've grown into this man;
I've listened to my heart and soul
And done the best I can.



Poems





Telling and Showing

Rizwan Akhtar - Pakistan

Having a kid and a wife I jot down
poetry to show that language
also matters at other places apart
from homemaking quotidian—

you insist on entering my pages
rolled in an unlawful contract
piracy of sublime panting
sneaked cuddles leaving behind
contrition that morphs into silence

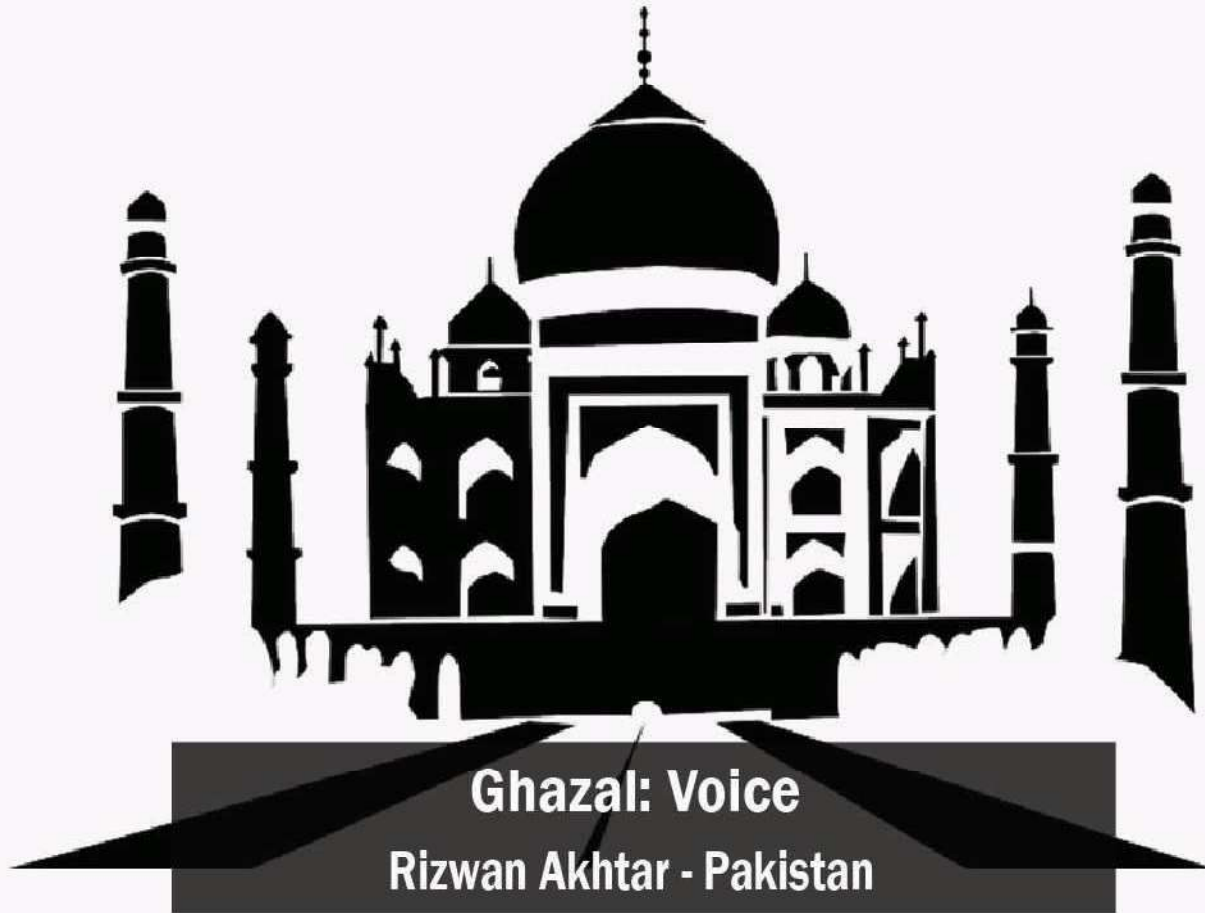
then! comes sentences (once
stripped) making me confess
that a poem ejaculates on itself

but you blame my narcissistic looks
undressing you; I meant to be mutual
but who listens to the creaking bed
at heart, I end up mustering up some
grit in dark corners editing myself.

◆◆◆

About the Writer

Rizwan Akhtar is one of the most acclaimed Pakistani poets writing in English. He is currently serving as an Assistant Professor at the University of the Punjab, Lahore. Lahore I am Coming is Rizwan Akhtar's first collection of poems and it has received tremendous applause on national and international forums. His poetry has been published in the UK as well as Canada, India, New Zealand and U.S.A.



Ghazal: Voice Rizwan Akhtar - Pakistan

after a long time, I listened to that darkness in your voice
searching sobbing in a sable night testing my own voice

memory of separation spills and you do not have a choice
keep your head on my shoulder preserve me in your voice

the days when you ran my name on the rosary to rejoice
are still intact; keep resurrecting your faith in your voice!

Shah Jahan sees Mumtaz sleeping and his heart decoys
love both immortal and perished; trapped in his voice,

I murmur in Urdu, articulate in English- my hybrid coils;
your name entangled after I colonized even your voice,

after that embrace comes Mutiny Bloodshed and Nosie
I kept your body like a relic; can't you feel a saint's voice,

a ghazel needs a constant revision before it is lionized
Rizwan! often custodians are sacred by their own voice.



Naomie

Stephanie Barbe Hammer
USA

Was beautiful in a not immediately
Apparent sort of way
She came into the wine shop and said
I cut hair.
I was dubious. She seemed too good to
Be true, but she was. Good and true, that is.
He went to her and then I went
And she was a brilliant stylist
And the nicest person
Tell me what you know she said
When she found out I was a professor
So I told her things and she asked
Questions and read the books
I recommended, including
The ones I had written.
She's gone now – moved to
Idaho, and sometimes I walk
By her empty shop in the little
Downtown where I used to live:
The walls painted a blueish grey
Embrace your beauty

Reads a placard.
I often find those sayings
Corny
But when I think of Naomie
I know she
Meant it;
a vision of her face
a snip of memory
falls onto the floor
not swept up:
a curl of the time
we spent together
lies here
for a truly good moment.

◆◆◆

About the Writer

Professor Emerita of Comparative Literature.
Allied faculty in Women's Studies and Creative
Writing, University of California, Riverside.
Instructor, Creative Writing, Hugo House Seattle.
Creative Writing Instructor, Inlandia Institute,
Riverside.
Advisory Board, Writers Bloc Presents, Los Ange-
les.



Maryam Raza - Pakistan

The gliding water
plays a symphony
of dribbling, twinkling,
Incessantly.
Caught by the wind,
The deep call of the
shimmering grey raven
arches out the glittering fish of Indus.
The ebony shadow rubs over
the wet scales;
Jolting ecstasy as it flows
beneath.

The pale sheen of moonlight
illuminates the tango of passion.
Fire evokes an ebony mist,
snaking up like the sensuous Duende.
From their deepest chasms
to their ignited breasts.
The raven lands on the jagged top.
A silken darkness befalls while the form
emerges of the demon's strong, chiselled arms
Raising from the burning chest atop the bull's strength.
His legs for a silhouette of power, calling.
Calling to the depths
in the dark river flowing beneath the enormity of Chillas.
A miasma of vehemence –
Till the blackness is infused with strokes of brown
streams.
Eyes search for him as she emerges.
Her silhouette gleams in black smoke
Doused by his gaze.
Droplets cling to her body –
yearning to be replaced by his warmth.
She shrieks in pleasure
As the brown grains of sand pierce her back –
He pierces her to be one with her.
To make her his.
- Till the sun cloaks their secret with the scorching reality.
Eternity repeats
Infinitum.

◆◆◆

About the Writer

Maryam Raza is a Lecturer in the Institute of English Studies, University of the Punjab. As an academician, her niche is Pakistan Writings in English. Maryam's poetic voice unlocks realms of psychosexuality and Confessional Poetry and her first collection of poems is in the process of publication. Her poems have been published in creative journals and anthologies such as Black Book of Poems: Volume 2, published by Aspiring Pens, Scotland's Glasgow West End and Ireland's The Galway Review.

Just Alive!

Zakia Nasir - Pakistan



About the Writer

Prof. Dr Zakia Nasir is the former Chairperson of Department of English, Lahore College for Women University, Lahore, Pakistan. She has to her credit poetry publications in the Waggle and various other magazines. Her first collection of poems, titled Musings, has received much acclaim in the literary circle of Pakistan.

There he lay a spectacle of vulturous
humanity
Body mutilated beyond memory
Senses numbed to debries of innocence which
would never now return
Forever will he be scarred
Unable to distinguish between friend and foe
What did he do to deserve this?
Just a five year old.
No fifty year old would've born such indignity!
Aching to the core wide eyed
he looked around blankly
Memory blurred
Hadn't he gone to buy a bowl of yoghurt for break-
fast?
Adamant he would not eat dry bread with weak tea
before going to school
His mother had taken out
the only crumpled tenner from her pocket
Sacrificing the afternoon meal veggies for her son
Anxiety had built into a buzzing in her head
He had not returned
Crazily searching the streets
a stranger had pointed to a crowd
No , no it couldn't be!
He could not not be dead!
So young so sweet so innocent
But in all sense he was dead
As she looked at his defiled form.
Never to return to normal life
A corpse in all sense
Not to be buried, just alive!

This poem is a heartfelt dedication to all those innocents who are a victim of child abuse.



The Apathy of Silence!

Zakia Nasir - Pakistan

I took so long locking the doors of my old house
Slowly securing the chains and sliders,
hooking in the small wooden framed glass ventilators
on the doors designed by the colonial rulers
Who despite being usurpers believed humans needed
to breathe
Needed natural light even in day time to see
In my childhood thieves found access through them
to steal in the dark of the night,
yet we kept them open
Bolting the errant two armed doors to submission I
forgot I was locking out my freedom
Afraid of being looted by the rich thieves
who endeavouring to win more riches
ransacked the houses of the poor without entering!
Throttled the voice less into further silence the vision-
less to blindness.
Awed I watch with open unseeing eyes the atrocities
of those
who make it seem it was our own doing
or we honestly deserved it;
lacking conviction to speak lacking courage to fight
and lacking gumption to be honest upright fighters of
the soil;

We should've trampled upon the coward
the corrupt and criminal to extinction when time
was ripe!
How far I see now is not my fault!
I was blindfolded when I sought knowledge
when I yearned for the stars I was
shackled
when I surged to rise
my wings were cut and I was pulled to the ground
to
be an underling of corrupted intellect
Curbed and crushed to please those who had
successful
sycophants
whose minds were think tanks which fed upon
carrion of the so called elite
Go! go away, oh you spectators who watch our
plight
being blared out in loud volumes through artifi-
cially intelligent media hype tailored for the
world.
Don't stand near me I contacted the disease of the
king
which strikes all those who speak out.
It strikes to death like a pestilence the honest and
true.
It doesn't let live those who speak
Go, go away!
The apathy of silence has stricken like a pandem-
ic
Go hide yourself in coal mines
so that when you appear again you're as black as
them
The coal dust choking your throats White eyes
blinking to idiocy!

Again Ends the Lockdown

Sufia Humayun - Pakistan

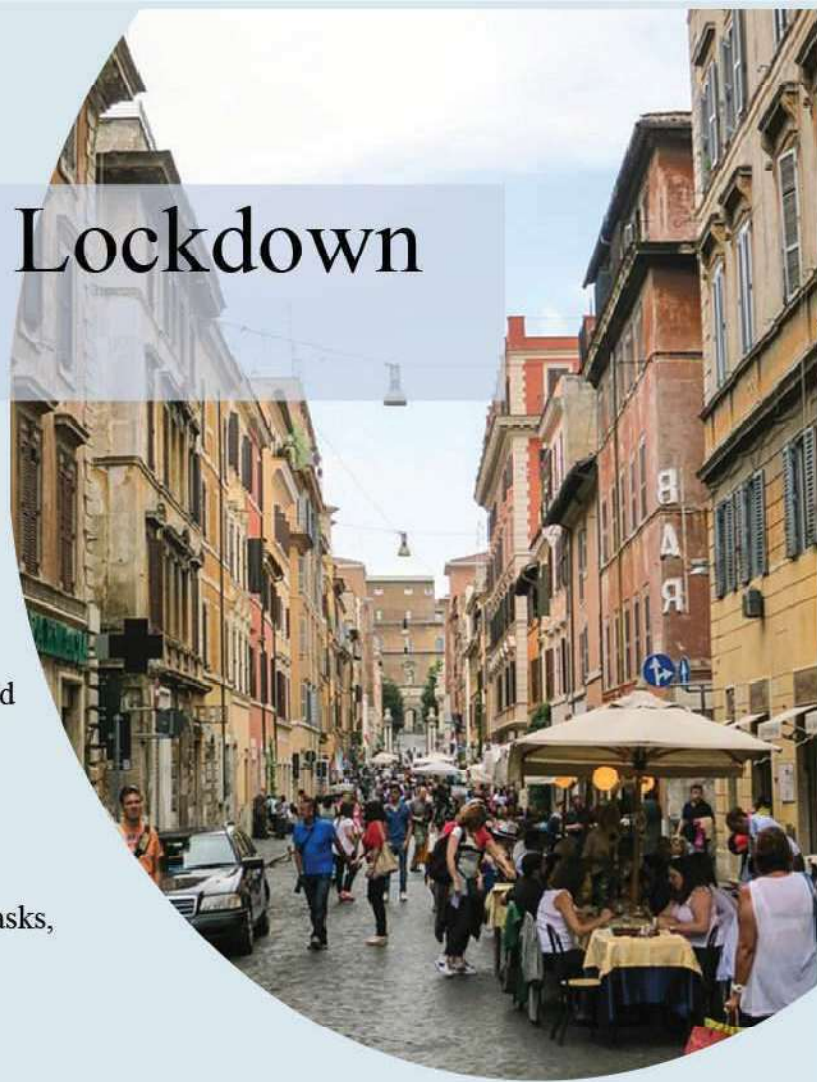
The city wakes up to end of Lockdown
Roads strewn with vehicles and people
It is 11 p.m. and yet cars jam, horns clash
Lahore comes out to crowd malls, restaurants
M.M.Alam Road, Walton Road, Main Boulevard
All packed and moving, keep moving.

They keep moving in circles, back and forth
Masked, unmasked, and some with dangling masks,
Skulking the virus to occupy the space,
Young boys and girls guffaw for no reason
Hanging outside waiting for an empty table.
All packed is the restaurant
From Inside and outside.

Sprawled is a mother embellished with dirt and dust
Along asleep are her oblivious children on each side
On dark patch of footpath facing a half done unlit building
Horns melt in fatigue while McDonalds' wraps tossed around
"How come she has no home to sleep but gets to eat McDonalds?"
A child blurts and it is too loud to listen
Lahore is out to eat and shop
To find traces of old days, more bold and more confident!

About the Writer

Sufia Humayun is a passionate writer and poet from Pakistan. She is currently teaching Creative Writing to undergraduate students at Gulberg College, Lahore.





A Symphony of Souls

Zargham Khan - Pakistan

In the tapestry of existence, I once believed,
Life was a struggle, where toil was conceived.
A quest for success, for happiness untold,
For most, the purpose of life, we behold.

Within our minds, dreams on canvas we paint,
Visions of joy, each unique, no restraint.
From tender years, we nurture these dreams,
But fail to see life's brevity, it seems.

Some grasp fragments of their dreams, it's true,
Yet fleeting joy, soon replaced, anew.
For life marches on, relentless and fast,
Acquire one thing, desire more, unsurpassed.

And so, the struggle persists, till the end,
I question, is this life, my dear friend?
Fatigue engulfs, a longing to release,
Shed the dreams, find solace, inner peace.

Why can't happiness be found in just being,
Living in the moment, heart's desires freeing?
Let go of the chase, the endless quest,
Embrace the present, let dreams find their rest.

They say life devoid of dreams, devoid of strife,
Would waste away, lose its vibrant life.
For our aspirations, our dreams ignite,
They propel us forward, in their grip we delight.

Indeed, the struggle, a captivating dance,
More satisfying than the outcome's glance.

Progression of humanity, a testament true,
Driven by dreams, we've reached where we do.

Yet, fixated we've become, on ambitions vast,
Countless pursuits, mundane shadows cast.
We spend our days in turning dreams to real,
Seeking satisfaction, a transient ordeal.

For fleeting happiness, we strive and yearn,
But at what cost? The toll, we discern.
Mental and physical anguish we endure,
Anxiety, disappointment, depression obscure.


In this pursuit, we neglect the world's charms,
Blinded by our dreams, we miss its warm arms.
A conundrum, it seems, in life's grand scheme,
A puzzle to solve, a balance, our dream.

Perhaps, a guiding light, a common thread,
To strike that balance, where fulfillment's bred.
Let us seek a solution, with open hearts,
Embracing life's beauty, playing our parts.

◆◆◆

About the Writer

Zargham Khan is a talented economist and a budding writer, known for his valuable contributions to the field of Economics and his love for literature. He has recently started his PhD in Economics from the University of Maryland. Having spent eight years as a Central Banker at the State Bank of Pakistan, Khan has played a vital role in the public policy landscape.



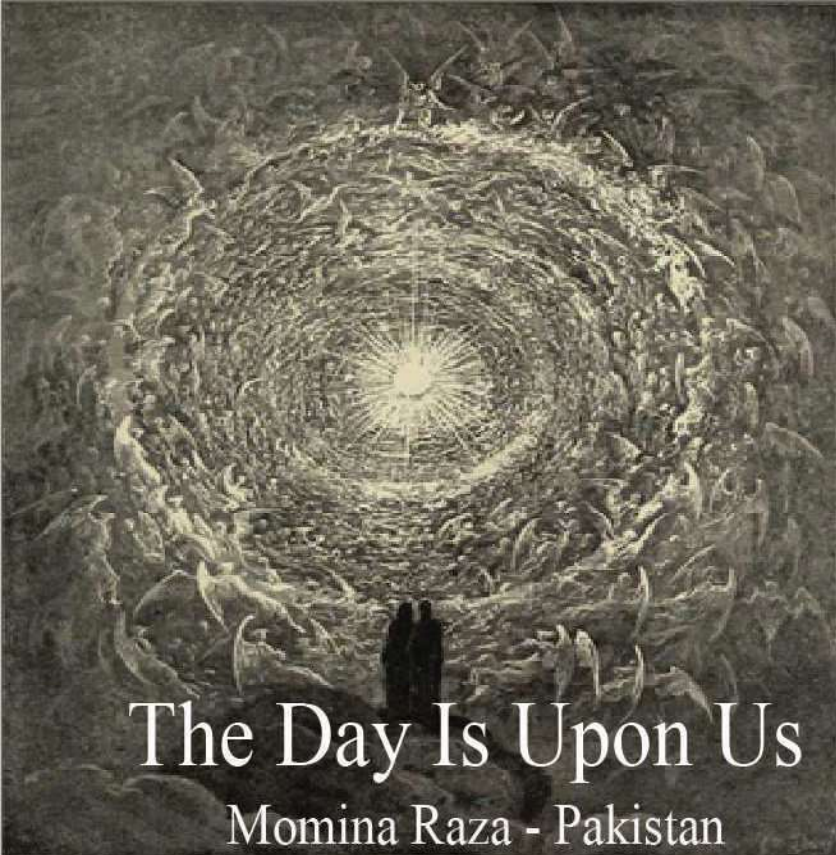
Have you seen
Spirits bent over
Under the weight
Of untold stories...

Amna Khawaja - Pakistan

◆◆◆

About the Writer

Amina Obaid Khawaja is an Assistant Professor at the department of Psychology at Lahore College for Women University, Lahore, Pakistan. The themes of her poems revolve around divinity, philosophy and human psychology.



The Day Is Upon Us

Momina Raza - Pakistan

The day is upon us

The day

My love

Most feared

Of Lucifer himself creeping out of Hell

Along with his demons and leviathans

Oozing with havoc and torment

The crucifix shakes upside down

And Christ suffocates with his own blood

Dripping on him

Breaking the promise of a better land

The dead have risen from the ground

With a lively passion to avenge themselves

And off they were to the Brandenburg Gate

Banging the doors with the clenched, lifeless fists

The gargoyles of French churches flying away to
swamps

For the terror is upon us

Like a plague of locusts

Satan's off springs free to walk upon this land

The Divine Fall is mocked

Damnation is upon us

Damning us

Diminishing us

Dehumanizing us into specks of dust

Watch them destroy Greece's legacy
They have her in their hellish hands
And all of Athens was stained
It's beauty and grace lay ripped and raped
Wailing but no one saved her
Watch them march to Parthenon
Horrific, hellish and godless beasts
Dancing in the godly temple
Where we once imagined to flee to
To unite in holy matrimony
Our haven lays in fragments of nothingness

Hear the symphonies of the bombs
The demon shamelessly signals them
Blow your trumpet, he yelled
And they did blow
With a force that blew away the souls from
bodies
All is lost and the day is upon us
Hues of red blinds us
They took me away from you
For I thought that it was God saving me
But it was not

My love, all is lost but our love
For we are not Adam and Eve to damn it all
away for Lucifer
A faint, beam of light calls us
And we shall meet there
I do not know when but if there is a God, he
shall favour us
Reunite us in the light
Make us love in the light
For we shall be the light of love
We shall be the reason of hope
We shall let humanity live
Omnia vincit amor
But for now....
The day is upon us

Picture: Gustave Doré's Dramatic Illustrations
of Dante's Divine Comedy



Echoes of The Nile- Cleopatra

Momina Raza

You may know me by many names,
The beautiful, the damned and the untamed.
But have you heard of my glory?
I reckon, there hasn't been a definite story.

So, let me hold your hand,
And escort you to my land
Egypt; an emblem of magnificence and history.
History is his story.
But where is her story?
Perhaps, it was silenced and blistery.
You may remember me for my beauty.
But I have a duty.
To share my path
I assure, I will not unleash my wrath.

Brace yourselves as I rise from the depths of the Nile.
The feminine is no longer meek but outrageously vile!
Here is her story,
To excavate her power and glory.

◆◆◆

About the Writer

Momina Raza is a graduate scholar of English Literature from Kinnaird College for Women, Lahore, Pakistan. With a budding passion for creativity, Raza takes a deep plunge into Gothic narratives emersed in feminist thought. Alongside that, Raza was the President of the Philosophy Club 2022-2023 at Kinnaird College for Women. She has an inherent interest in emerging Philosophy with Literature, Arts and Media. Raza has published her short stories on many platforms and has won several writing competitions at Kinnaird College for Women. Her current interests are American Studies and Film Studies.





I Belong

Madiha Mustafa

I belong
Not to a street or town
A city or Downe
Not to a country or continent
The sea or ocean
Or the vale and mountain
I belong
Not to the vast blue sky
Or to the stars and the moon up high
Or the sun that glorifies
The day or to the night
I belong
Not to the mother earth
Solemnly suspended
In the infinity and entirety
Of the universe that beholds
The wonders far and beyond
I belong not to a mortal
Not to my mother or father
Or a beloved I've longed for
I belong not to myself
Or the body I'm confined to
The veins! The fibers!
And the blood that flows within
Or the breaths I deeply take in

I belong
Not to customs caste or creed
A color or religion
Or the name given to me
Do I belong at all?
To the one who raised us from mud
And poured light into us
Where it begins and
Where it all shall end
To all the questions asked
And where the answers lie
To whom the day breaks to
And where it dies
To whom the wind bows to
And seasons comply
To whom the heavens belong to
Nothing can defy
The lord of the lords
The creator
The giver and the taker
The master and the maker
Of my spirit and soul
Unto him I belong!





Carpe Diem

Madiha Mustafa - Pakistan

Walking back home on a Friday eve
Frozen hands and chattering teeth
Smokey gray skies so forlorn
'Another cold weekend'
The newsagent groaned
As I picked up a loaf for the early morn.

I pulled the curtains
At the crack of the dawn
Lo and Behold
I witnessed
A glorious blue sky and
The sun so bold
Shining bright and warm
Melting our frozen bones

Her face lit up
'Let's seize the day'
She said smiling ear to ear
'Picnic on the greens or the Brighton pier
Brighton it is with its toasty rocks
The cool crisp air
The seagulls in flocks
Gliding yachts with rainbow sails

Smoking grandpa's fishing on the docks
Southern we boarded
From East Croydon station
A lot to catch up on our way to Brighton
The train was bustling with happy faces
Beach lovers and hungry for the sun bathers

As we got off, I got the whiff
Of something I could never resist
Golden Brown with a crispy crown
Cornwall pasty! Please, I insist!
Marching towards the beach
Devouring each bite
Of the Cornwall delight
Brimming with excitement
Crowds parading the streets

The sun chairs and umbrellas
Blankets and novellas
Basking in the winter sun
Our cherished pleasure and fun
Carpe Diem!

Fish and chips from the local chippy
And cappuccinos for when it gets nippy
Read a book or catch a song
Have an ice cream or snooze a little
Long walks on the pier with colorful sights

Fun filled games and carousel rides
Once at the pier we can't be forgetting
The freshly fried donuts in cinnamon dusting

For a while we would forget ourselves

Free as children and out of our shells
Free of worries of paying the rent
Winter blues and those working pants
Finally walking back towards the station
With the sun setting behind us
Gleeful and refreshed
Making memories that will remind us
The Brighton Pier and my dearest friend
Will always be a perfect blend.

◆◆◆

About the Writer

An educationist by profession; a thinker, a writer and a traveller by passion, Madiha Mustafa is a seeker of peace, inspired and driven by Sufism. She has a Masters degree in English Literature from Pakistan and a Masters degree in TEFL from the UK. She has over 14 years experience of teaching EFL/ ESL/EAP and English Literature in the Middle East, Europe, Pakistan and the USA.





A New Strategy

Sadia Munawar - Pakistan

Should I tell you a new strategy
For a happy, cool and peaceful life
Free yourself from certain worries
Greed of acquiring precious things
Urge to know other's intentions
And throw the burden of unhealthy relations
Griefs, mistakes and failures of past
Get a liberation from lies of the world
Hurting, fearful and cynical feelings
And proving yourself always right

Should I tell you a new strategy
For a happy, cool and peaceful life
Adore your blessings every day
Check yourself and correct your faults
Give, forgive and learn to be kind
Look for goodness in little things
And strive to bring a meaning to life
By cultivating a grateful and hopeful mindset
And spreading love, smiles and positive vibes
For what you do, comes back to you!



Moonlight Epiphany

Narjis Raza - Pakistan

On a summer night so fair,
Under the moon's full and shining glare,
A cool breeze did softly blow,
With the queen of night's fragrance aglow.

In the night jasmine, fireflies did hide,
And as I gazed up, a thought did collide,
Could anyone be more beautiful than this moon?
An answer came swift, like a prophetic boon.

"Yes," it whispered, and a name came to mind,
Yours, my love, so precious and kind.
Even the moon has a blemish, it's true,
But not in you, oh, how wondrously you do.

Your eyes, like brown almonds, bright,
Twinkling with a starry light,
Deeper than the oceans, they seem to be,
A never-ending mystery.

How much you mean to me,
How much in awe of you I'll always be.
Even when you're angry, like a stormy sea,
You're still the most beautiful to me.

For all the seasons and sights to see,
Pale in comparison to what you mean to me!

Loneliness or Freedom?

Narjis Raza

In the morning, you rise alone,
No gentle voice to call you home,
No one waiting when you return,
Your solitude, a bitter burn.

Yet in the day, you have your way,
No one to tell you what to say,
No schedule, no demands to meet,
Your freedom, oh so bittersweet.

Is it loneliness that haunts your heart,
Or freedom that sets you apart?
The answer, my friend, is yours to find,
In the quiet of your restless mind.

About the Writer

Narjis Raza is a passionate emerging writer based in Lahore, Pakistan. Her work mostly deals with the topics concerning the natural world around her.





Sugarcoated

Labeeqa Baneen - Pakistan

Sweet, seductive, sugar,
How you tease and tempt,
Your crystalline structure,
So pure and so refined,

You dance upon my tongue,
A symphony of flavors,
Your sweetness so intense,
It's hard to resist your allure.

From candy to the cakes,
From donuts to the pies,
You bring a smile to my face,
And joy to my eyes.

But oh, how deceptive,
Your charm can be,
For too much of you,
Is not good for me.

You're hidden in so many foods,
In sauces and dressings too,
It's hard to escape your grasp,
And find something new.

Yet I can't help but love you,
In all your forms and hues,
For you bring so much pleasure,
And happiness, it's true.

So let me savor your taste,
In moderation, of course,
For though you may be addictive,
I'll never let you be my boss.

Sweet, seductive, sugar,
How you make life sweet,
I'll treasure your presence,
But not let you defeat.

◆◆◆

About the Writer

Labeeqa Baneen's poems have been published at various online and print forums. This particular poem was originally published at poetry.com.



Magic

Labeeqa Baneen - Pakistan

Magic is a whisper in the night
A secret spell cast just right
It sparkles in the eyes of a child
And makes the heart of the brave run wild

It dances on the tips of fingers
And turns ordinary things into wondrous figures
It conjures dreams and visions bold
And tells tales of a world untold

With a wave of a wand and a flick of a wrist
The impossible becomes possible with a twist
The ordinary becomes extraordinary
And reality seems a little less ordinary

It lives in the pages of ancient books
And hides in the corners of forgotten nooks
It enchants the mind and soothes the soul
And makes the broken heart feel whole

Magic is a world of endless possibility
A place where the imagination can roam free
It fills the heart with wonder and delight
And turns the darkest night into light.





Storms Raging Within

Imama Khawaja - Pakistan

I like dark nights and thunderstorms
Because isn't it reassuring to know
That there is something louder
than the voices in your head...

Soothing when it scares me
Because I'm tired of fearing
my own recurring thoughts, on replay
Like a broken record, forced to listen

And when thunder brings heavy rain,
Piercing through curtained windows
Relief, for there is something more piercing
Then the gaze they stare with

Like a cake too sweet, venom for icing
Feeding me words that poison my hopes
That once rested in my scarred heart, now
Dead hope trickles down my eyes, bleeding

Yet still you question my rage, this anger
When all I see is red through these orbs
That leaked from the version of me
you stabbed with your sweet venom

But solving word problem is such a mess...

◆◆◆

About the Writer

Imama Khawaja is a literature student who believes words are powerful means of expressing the inner dilemma and observation. Her writings aim to remind of God's presence in every little thing that one's eye can capture, celebrating people she loves and experiences that have changed her in the best way possible.

Scars, Oh Scars!

Asfa Iman



I look upon my face
With rueful eyes
At scars,
That tell a tale
Of pain and sighs
Scars, oh scars,
How you remind me so,
Of a time when I struggled
And felt low

Acne, oh acne,
How you still haunt me so
A constant reminder,
Of my skin's woe
Your presence has caused me,
Pain and strife
And robbed me,
Of my self-esteem in life

The scars you leave
Are more than just physical
They are a reminder
Of a time,
So difficult
Of insecurities

And self-doubt galore
A battle I fought,
But not alone for sure

Traumas of life,
Some have healed,
And some remain
A reflection,
Of life's joys and pains
But I know that
Just like the scars on my face
Healing will come,
At its own pace

So let the scars be a testament
To my might
Of a time that was tough,
But I fought the fight
And know that,
No matter what life throws my way
I will rise with courage and pride
And will conquer each day...





To Dear Self

Amina Ali - Pakistan

In amber rays of broad daylight,
Hope takes flight, dreams ignite,
Dear self, I'll compose a poem for you,
A tapestry of phrases out of the blue,

Amidst rustling bustling leave,
Let me sketch such an ease,
Where mother nature gleefully sings,
And angels spread feathered wings.

Where dew drops gently embrace,
And moonlight echoes your praise,
Let me pen with such a grace,
That it syncs with your heart's pace,

I'll add a mysterious hue,
To reincarnate your feelings blue,
For the ballets in thou eyes,
Direct me to carve a sorrowful sky,

Solitary paths and gushing shores,
Teach us how to humbly bend,
Leading us to enigmatic doors,
Where fantasies and realities blend,

Let it hymn in thy heart and soul,
And cause your inner strength to unfold
Read these melodic rhymes so fine,
They will stay in tide and time,

This tapestry of wonder, hold tight,
Let it awake your inner sight,
With every inch, you will revive
And in this world rise to strive



The Biker in my Town!

Ayesha Tariq
Pakistan

I see a biker riding in my town
Unperturbed by glares and social frown

Curly locks fluttering wild in the air
She seems in a hurry; no time to spare

Pink satchel she's carrying on her slender shoulder
Making a loud statement that she's bolder

Wish to have a closer look at her
She has certainly made a lot of stir

Couldn't get to her; she is going far
As she is on a bike and I on car!



About the Writer

Ayesha Tariq is an Assistant Professor of English Literature at Govt. Islamia Graduate College for Women, Cooper Road, Lahore, Pakistan. Ayesha's passion for literature extends beyond academia, as evidenced by her published journalistic articles. Her insightful writings have graced the pages of prominent national newspapers, including The Nation and Naya Daur, as well as esteemed international publications like The Week and Punjab Today. Her commitment to fostering a deep appreciation for English Literature in her students is matched only by her dedication to contributing to the literary landscape through her own written works.



Fitness



Importance of Exercise for Female Health



Whenever we think of healthcare, we think of medical profession, physician and a visit to doctors, preventive measures, lab tests and immunizations. But despite all this there is one thing which is under our own control and which will avoid many health issues end that is EXERCISE.

Regularly sweating out in your living room, backyard or local nature spot is key to your well-being. It boosts your mood, keeps your heart healthy put you in touch with your body and helps you maintain a healthy weight. Exercise daily for 35-40 minutes or 5 hours for a week is mandatory for every person.

Being a woman, I need to be healthy to avoid health hazards to my family. Let me tell you why exercise is important for me, for you and for all the wonderful ladies out there.

1. Fitness

Fitness to the human body is what fine tuning is to an engine.



Fitness is a quality of being suitable to fulfill a particular role or task. Fitness is actually a key term for all other functions of our body doing well. It involves the heart, lungs and muscles of body. What we do with our bodies affects our minds. Exercise improves all 5 components of fitness flexibility, muscular strength, endurance, body composition and cardiopulmonary endurance. So fitness helps us look, feel and do our best.

2. Obesity



If BMI is 30 or higher it falls within the obesity range. Women are slightly more likely (40%) than men (35%) to have obesity. Being too fat will lead to many health related problems and if you are female you can't neglect cosmetic point of view. So by doing exercises, we can overcome obesity and can avoid all aspects of obesity like fertility, hormonal imbalance, PCOS, heart disease, diabetes and breast cancer.

3. Anxiety/Depression



Women are going through depression due to multiple reasons like puberty, menstruation, pregnancy, menopause and hormone such estrogen progesterone and testosterone imbalance. Asian women experience it due to multiple domestic issues. Exercise can cure all these issues leading to anxiety /depression. A simple bike ride, dance class or even a brisk walk can be a powerful tool to overcome depression. Seven best exercises for anxiety are running, hiking, yoga, weight lifting, take long walk, swimming and dancing.

4. PMS/Dysmenorrhea



PMS (premenstrual syndrome) have symptoms like pain, anxiety, depression, mood swings, acne, tiredness, insomnia (sleep disturbance) bloating and headaches etc. One should be more physically active and do greater intensity exercises at this hour of month. During Dysmenorrhea (painful periods) in light menstrual days moderate intensity aerobic exercises like walking or light jogging can reduce bloating pain and cramping. Exercises especially cycling, jogging and hiking will decrease these symptoms.

5. Hormone Regulation

SYMPTOMS OF HORMONAL IMBALANCES



Irregular hormones will cause anxiety, depression, PCOS, weight gain, PMS dysmenorrhea and infertility. Aerobic exercises helps you regulate blood circulation and release of feel good hormones called endorphins. High intensity exercises like squatting, lunges, pull ups, crunches and pushups are ideal. To regulate hormones you might work out heavy and it might not break for at least 15 minutes.

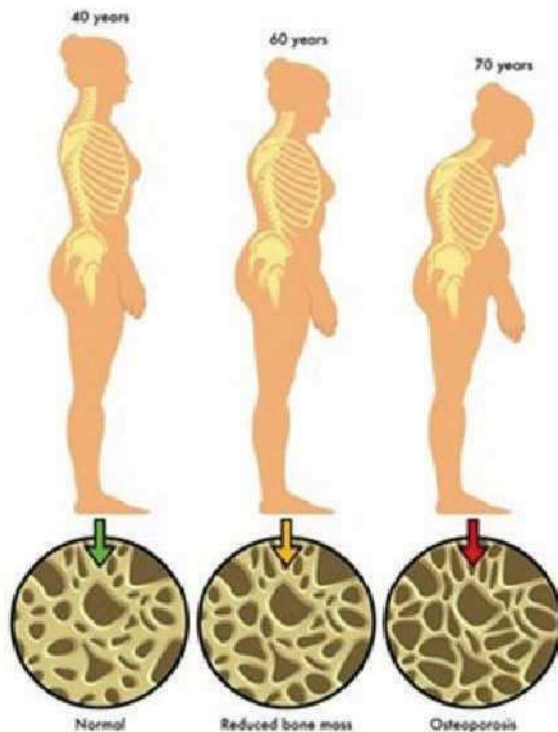
6. Infertility

Some reasons for infertility like obesity, PCOS, hormonal imbalance, anxiety or depression will react best when exercises are done regularly.



High / low intensity exercises help us to reduce weight and maintain hormones which will ultimately resolve infertility. Exercises / being active can boost your fertility. Women who do regular moderate intensity exercises get pregnant quicker than women who don't exercise. Exercise will increase blood flow to uterus and ovaries resulting in better egg quality and implantation. Jogging, aerobics, and spinning are good examples of exercises helpful for infertility. Note: Once you are pregnant, don't perform high intensity exercises.

7. Osteoporosis



Osteoporosis is decreased mineral content in bones and it will cause increased degeneration of bones and joints associated with age. Women are more prone to develop osteoporosis due to multiple pregnancies, lactation (breast feeding) and negligence towards themselves while taking care of family n kids. So, moderate intensity exercises will increase blood flow to bones bringing all necessary nutrients to the bone and decreasing their porous conditions because if bones become weak over time it can lead to fracture of bone even with minor trauma or even by one's weight itself.

8. To avoid arthritis/ degenerative changes



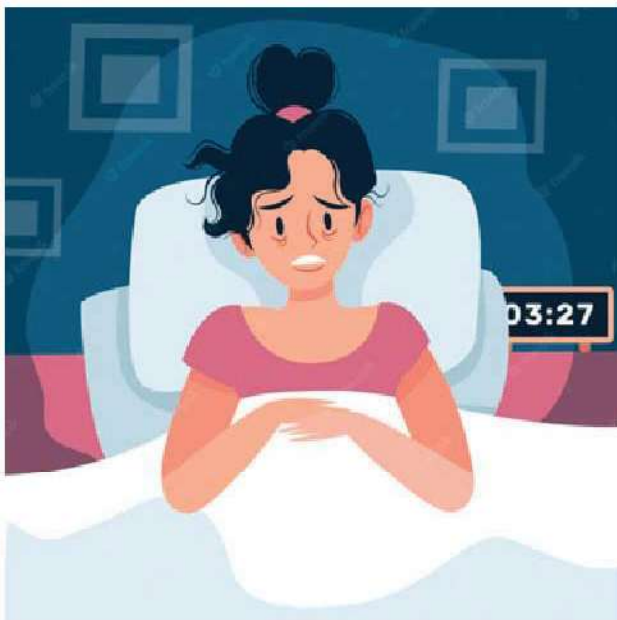
Due to decreased mineral content of bone and decreased calcium level in body due to pregnancies, breast feeding women develop degenerative changes in joints and it will lead to arthritis which is very painful and can lead to deformity and disability. Depending on age 150- minutes of light intensity or 75 minutes of moderate intensity exercise for a week are important to avoid arthritic changes in bones and joints. So being active will be helpful for you to remain healthy and to socialize all life.

9. Decrease pregnancy complications



Exercises will help pregnant women to remain active and will increase chances of labor pain leading to normal delivery. Moderate intensity exercises during second and third trimester will decrease the chances of gestational diabetes, pre-eclampsia (high blood pressure during pregnancy) and caesarian section. An active woman will give birth to an active child. Exercises also decrease other pregnancy problems like anxiety, depression and mood swings. Staying active and busy in doing exercises will refrain them from negative thinking and thoughts.

10. Insomnia



Insomnia (absence of sleep) is a very serious psychological issue of many women. If a woman is sleep deprived she can't perform her duties actively and efficiently. So exercises like jogging, running, biking swimming and aerobics will help women to fall asleep faster and peacefully.

11. Regulate blood pressure

Some ways to help control blood pressure



Eat a heart-healthy diet that includes potassium and fiber.



Drink plenty of water.



Exercise regularly.



Don't smoke.



Limit alcohol consumption to one drink a day for women, two a day for men.



Limit salt consumption to less than 1,500 mg per day.



Try to avoid stress.



Maintain a healthy body weight.

Source: U.S. National Library of Medicine

Exercises will decrease cholesterol level in body and will regulate blood pressure. So women can save themselves from much cardiac disease like heart arrest, hemorrhage, cardiomyopathy, valvular issues, and vascular narrowing

About the Writer

Dr. Faryal Arshad is a Consultant Physiotherapist from Pakistan who is also working as a senior lecturer at a prestigious institute in Lahore. She is certified in acupuncture and kinesio taping techniques and intra-articular injection therapy. Currently she is specializing in her field and aspires to become a women health specialist.

**'It's never too late to be what you might've been.'
George Eliot.**





Articles



HUMAN RIGHTS

How can Psychologists promote Humanity? Dr Saima Eman shares her insight on the sensitive issue of human rights.

Dr Saima Eman - Pakistan

Human rights psychology is an emerging field. Psychologists are generally involved with human rights in terms of following the ethical guidelines and thus preventing any harm to living beings while doing research; see What is 'human rights psychology'? (apa.org)

I am sharing some of my practical experiences to suggest what psychologists can do to promote human rights and humanity (care for all living beings and peace). As a psychologist, I am promoting human rights through several different ways.

I wrote to my society's secretary to do something about garbage burning in our community to prevent burning smoke from entering our homes. I wrote a letter to the editor of a newspaper about trees being chopped outside my society/town to widen the roads (breathing clean air as a human right).

I write blogs, conduct, present and publish psychological research relevant to human rights. I am working on research related to discrimination, informal dementia caregivers, environmental psychology/plastic reuse (right to clean environment), adoption, and everyday sadism.

I also promote human rights by teaching my students about research ethics. I drafted and adapted comprehensive ethics applications. I taught them the ethics of recruiting participants online, pursuing data collection in an ethical way, and then writing in an ethical way (avoiding plagiarism, authorship rights, etc). I delivered a webinar on ethics in communication and research ethics to university students and faculty members.

I often post opportunities in relation to Human rights education and careers at Twitter and Facebook.

I participated in **volunteer litter picking activity** at Coventry University (clean environment as a human right)

I always keep **my attention focused on students' welfare and their rights**. I encourage students to participate in class, to express their thinking about the module, and ask questions. I use the principles of coaching psychology in psychology teaching, assessment, and research. I supported research students/staff in their research write-up through weekly writing retreats.

I regularly **sign/share petitions or write** to the local MP at Change.org, PETA and Amnesty International. I signed more than 300 petitions many of which were successful.

Sometimes, **I donate to Amnesty International** to prevent violence (peace is a human right).

I am member of the Advisory Council at Global Network of Psychologists: Advisory Council (humanrightspychology.org). I voluntarily send them my contributions in the form of articles/my interview, news links or when prompted for advice.

I often **share posts on social media**. I have several Facebook pages and groups that are related to human rights. Following are those pages:

1. Think Logically

The purpose of this page: <https://www.facebook.com/ThinkLogicallyAlways> is to stimulate logical thinking to promote human equality, equity, and welfare. The topics covered relate to all sorts of things that require logical thinking such as health, wellbeing, and happiness. It has posts about body shaming, rights of people with mental disorders, poor people, transgender, ethnic minorities, spouses, nature/environment, women, logic of human politics, prejudice, education, religion, culture, artificial intelligence, terrorism, health, etc.

2. Adoptive Human's Rights

This is a private group: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/675529395957672>, which is about promoting rights of adopted children, adult adoptees and adoptive parents. Through my own story, I have raised important aspects of adoption and the rights of adopted ones through articles, posts, blogs, videos, metaphors, poems, and quotations.

3. Everyday Sadistic Tendencies Treatment

This is a group: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/NaturalEverydaySadism> exploring treatment of sadistic tendencies (in the form of bullying, teasing, fooling, making fun of others) in the subclinical/non-clinical population. It shows videos and papers on sadistic tendencies and the discussion on how to rectify such tendencies.

4. Global Children Association:

This is a page about child rights: <https://www.facebook.com/global.children.united.Shifa.Asif.Philosophy>

All the children from all over the world can express themselves here by talking about anything of their interest. Adults can also communicate about their children through this page. So, it is a kind of voice for children through wall posts, videos, artwork, speeches, and creative writing.

5. Khan Bahadur Visionaries

This is my social work NGO main page: <https://www.facebook.com/KhanBahadurVisionaries> that addresses human rights in general focusing on child rights, elderly rights, women's rights, persons with dementia rights, adoptive human's rights, environmental human's rights, sports' rights (freedom to engage in sports for women), educational rights, rights to creative thinking, writing, and cultural celebration.

6. Dementia and Delirium Support Lahore

This page: <https://www.facebook.com/dementia.support.Lahore> is about supporting people with dementia and delirium and dementia and delirium caregivers in Lahore, Pakistan. It consists of my university awareness campaigns on dementia, latest research, interesting tips and facts about dementia. I also provide consultancy to those who contact me through this page.

About the Writer

Dr. Saima Eman (she/hers), CPsychol, APA MFP Fellow, Postdoc, Ph.D (UK), M.Sc. (UK), M.Sc. & CHRP. (PK), B.A, B.Sc. (PK)
Teaching Fellow-Psychology (Business and Organisational Psychology)
Coventry University
UK Alumni Awards Finalist 2021 in Professional Achievement Category in Pakistan, The British Council
Commonwealth Alumni Advisory Panel Member, UK.
Certified Publons Peer Reviewer.
Advisory council member at Global network of Psychologists for Human Rights.
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A Strange Mystery!

Amina Ali - Pakistan

Man has always been driven by his desire to conquer the world. He found sustenance in lush green fields, gold in mines and treasure in the depth of ocean. Amidst all these triumphs, he has yet to unravel the mystery of his own home.

For a man, woman has always been an unresolved puzzle and when she's his wife, the challenge doubles. However, no one dares to confront this truth openly. As it is akin to bell a cat - Those who dared, visited the emergency rooms of hospitals. Even esteemed channels like "Natural Geographic" and "Discovery Channel" refrain from commenting on this specie. This being is found in almost every street on a broad day light. A flock of them can be seen in either a shopping mall or a food stall. You guessed it! Shopping and eating happens to be their forte. Perhaps she is the only specie having tons of clothes yet complaining of an empty wardrobe once she steps outside her abode. Though other animals have feathers and furs to cover themselves, but this specie utilizes magic of cosmetic.

A woman embodies various roles; a mother, a daughter, a sister, a wife and above all, a bombastic force threatening life. It wouldn't be far-fetched to name her "a nuclear weapon". Rest assured, to

support my argument, I will provide numerous evidences. Firstly, you will witness their transformation into a monster when discontented. Secondly, they are never content in any situation. Imagine a scenario where she asks; "Do I look stunning in this dress?". Dare not reply "yes" or "no" or even "yes" followed by "no". If you reply a "yes" then she'll probe further questions like, "Do you think I gained weight? Wasn't the other dress better? Is it suitable for the occasion? Etc.. A single erroneous reply will make you fall into her trap. Beware of uttering a "no", for if you say so, then you'll be searching for sustenance and residence. Even silence is a grave offense as it means not admiring her natural beauty.

Nature adorned this specie with sweetness, spice and everything nice, yet wisdom slipped through some unseen cracks. Point her errors out in an argument and later you'll surely lament. Pierce her heart and you'll witness jealousy gushing in her blood. If she encounters a woman prettier than her, she starts slandering her among her fellows. In case, someone disagrees with her criticism, she simply suggests them to visit an ophthalmologist. Fret not, it's just her natural desire to look "fairest of them all". Women are as busy as bees. You'll rarely find them idle as gossips have no specific time. Her sight is no less than a binocular searching for a target to accompany her in her gossips.

Now you might wonder why I penned down against women? It began when my wife placed her mother's vase on the corner of the side table. An involuntary act of my hand shattered it to infinite pieces. Though she knew that it was solely her mistake yet she expelled me from home. Thus, I found temporary solace in writing this essay on women while seated at my friend's house, watching his quarrel with his wife over whether or not to welcome me for the night.

◆◆◆



It is Okay to Not be Okay!

Aleena Rehman

Pakistan

About the Writer

Aleena Rehman is a young emerging writer based in Lahore, Pakistan. From Sociology and Business Studies to a keen interest in Psychology and English Literature, Aleena has a vast array of interests that engage her in multiple educational and creative pursuits. Her short stories, poems and articles have been published at various national and international magazines, journals and creative forums. She is also working as an Assistant Editor (Non-Fiction) for SHARK REEF, which is an online creative journal based in the US. For Aleena, writing is a way to access the hidden dwelling of human soul and she enjoys visiting this abode, very frequently!



Depression, a term defining a heavy weight on the soul of a person, creeps into the lives of unfortunate individuals and creates a sense of hopelessness. It robs people of their happiness, leaving behind a void. Gray dullness replaces the colors of joy in life as they find themselves switching to a personality they would have never developed by choice. In medical terms, depression is a long-lasting feeling of sadness that is diagnosed with the right symptoms. However, it is more than just a mental illness, and it is definitely more than just feeling “sad”. It is an all-consuming darkness that engulfs an individual’s emotional wellbeing, mind as well as physical state, stripping away their sense of control over their own body and mind and creating a disturbed sense of self.



Ranging from a teenager going through social or education related problems to an adult struggling to keep up with their financial position, depression does not just limit itself to certain selective groups. Its omnipresence affects people of all ages, genders and backgrounds. Some societies ignore the concept of depressed minors or young depressed individuals. These individuals find it difficult to open up about their depressive state due to societal pressure and judgmental or conservative mindsets. The concept of depression is often surrounded by a stigma and misconceptions, the fear of the opinions and perspectives of the society towards this situation leads to people suffering in silence. A lack of empathy from the society leads to a very negative approach towards the overall situation, they should be aware that such a mental burden is not by choice and entirely out of the individual's control. Therefore, it is substantial to comprehend the fact that this illness can establish its presence in any person, with its origin varying from biological factors to traumatic experiences or just a generally unpleasant series of events. This supports the idea that a cry for help from any individual, regardless of their background, should be strongly considered and given importance to.

Try throwing a pebble in a body of water, once it touches the surface it will create a ring of waves surrounding the area where the pebble dropped, also known as a ripple. Depression does not only create a weight on the mind of the afflicted person alone, its effects ripple outwards, extending to the loved ones. People who are emotionally attached to the affected individual will generate within themselves a feeling of concern when they observe them isolating themselves or exhibiting other prominent signs of depression. When situations such as a declining level of energy or a diminishing sense of self-worth in the affected person are

perceived, it is likely that their sense of helplessness will also spread to their loved ones. As a young adult myself, I have present in my life, people rather close to me who are stuck in the dark phase of major depressive disorder. It may not appear as a genuine issue to people who have not experienced any situation in relevance. Although it may be a subjective point of view, my personal experience speaks for itself, suggesting that having to observe a loved one go through a prolonged phase of this mental illness leaves an unpleasant effect on the observers themselves.

Embracing the path to healing may be less convenient for some individuals and more for others. It requires combining professional help, possibly medication in the case of a major disorder, support from loved ones and your own personal progress. Seeking therapy and opening up about experiences may assist individuals in navigating their emotional landscape and regaining some self-control. Additionally, the necessary support of loved ones is essential for a positive progress towards a healed self or new start. One should always be aware that whatever the situation, certain people which may include family and friends are always there to listen and respond to your problems with words of affirmation. However, the factor that holds the most significance is personal progress. If an individual is not willing to heal, or does not have the hope to heal, there will be little or no effect of any advice from external sources on their mind. As individuals ourselves, we hold the power to be a beacon of hope for anyone battling depression. Showing compassion and empathy is an important step in ensuring that you have dealt fairly and positively with the situation. Stand up, be the helping hand, encourage them and let them know that it is okay to not be okay!



**"If you can dream it, you can do it."
Walt Disney.**

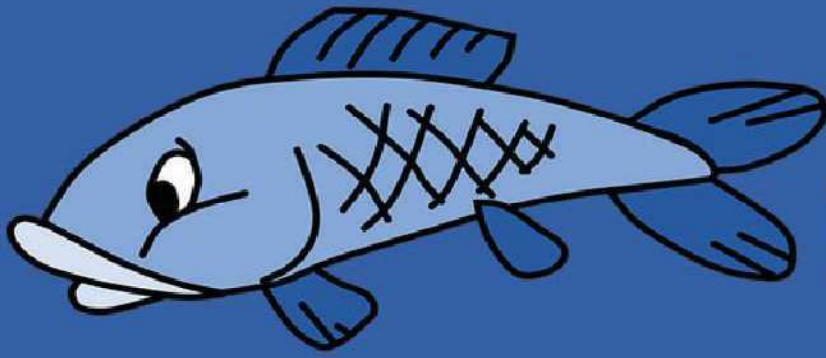




**Stories
Poems**

young minds

Young Minds



Luckily for You

Haris Irfan - Pakistan

Fishie, fishie, fishie, fishie
Swim deep down into the sea
And there you'll find a fearsome beast
And on you it'll surely feast
You'll be trapped inside its belly
And you'll slowly become like jiggly jelly
The stomach acids will dissolve you
Until you become a liquid too.
But very luckily for you
I'm having you as fish stew

I guess it's better than slowly dying
In a monster's stomach; but I suppose you aren't buying
This poorly thought-out idea of mine
My same, repeated, trickster line!

◆◆◆

About the Writer

Haris Irfan is a Grade 5 student from Islamabad. He has a wide array of interests from reading and writing to music, sports, drawing and cooking.

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

Hibba Bukhari - Pakistan

Lucy and Lilly were playing football in their garden. Suddenly Lilly kicked so high that the ball fell into a house nearby. "Great... the ball is gone now and it's all your fault Lilly". "I am sorry, Lucy, now let's go get the ball".

"Fine".

Lucy and Lilly entered the deserted house. Nobody had lived there for almost 5 decades. There were lots of rumors about it. People said it was haunted. The house was spooky and there were lots of spider webs on the walls. Lucy was getting scared. They couldn't find their ball, but Lilly heard some noises from the kitchen, so they entered the kitchen. There they saw tea boiling on the stove. Lilly and Lucy got very scared and ran to the exit door. But the door was gone! It just disappeared. There was no way out. They were trapped. They started beating the walls and shouted for help, but nothing worked.

The girls tried to calm down and rub their eyes. A miracle happened! The door appeared right where it was before. Lucy and Lilly saw that the ball was beside the table. As they picked up the ball and were about to leave, they heard a voice from behind

"My dears don't go without drinking tea". They looked back and saw two cups of tea floating in the air. Lucy and Lilly got terrified and quickly ran towards their house as fast as they could...

About the Writer

My name is Hibba Bukhari. I will be 10 years old on 25 June. I have completed 4 grades and I love to write imaginary stories.



12345678



Math : a headache


Naymah - Pakistan

Math is a mystery
Algebra has a long history
When I practice math, I start to weep
And after a while, I go to sleep
I don't like multiplication
it gives me bad sensation
Math is so boring
It makes me go snoring
Division is sometimes really hard
not sometimes but always hard
Addition and subtraction is fine ,I guess
But solving word problem is such a mess...

◆◆◆

About the Writer

My name is Naymah Adnan. I am a student of grade 10. I am passionate about writing and hope to pursue it as a dream. I enjoy writing short essays and poems. I found it so much interesting when it comes to writing on my own. My hobby is to read books and improve my vocabulary and then write my own short stories.

An abstract painting with a vibrant, textured background. The colors are primarily shades of blue, green, and red, with some yellow and purple accents. The brushstrokes are thick and expressive, creating a sense of movement and depth. The overall effect is a rich, multi-layered composition.

Sketch Work

Sketch Work

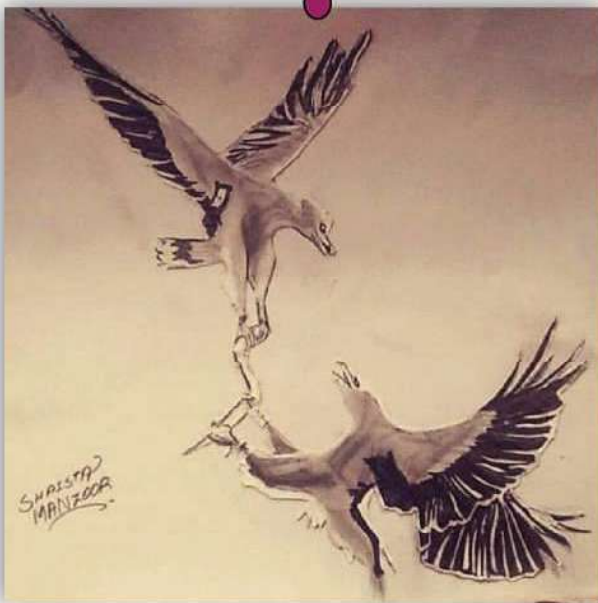




◆◆◆ About the Artist

As an emerging artist and sketch maker, Shaista Manzoor has an innate love for art from a young age and she has been honing the skills as a sketch maker, creating mesmerizing pieces that breathe life into the canvas. Her journey as an artist has been one of dedication, experimentation, and fearless exploration. As an emerging young artist, Shaista believes that her work will make its unique place in local exhibitions and online platforms, will captivate audiences and will receive admiration from fellow artists and art enthusiasts.

With an unwavering passion for self-expression and an unyielding desire to push her artistic limits, Shaista is poised for an incredible journey and opportunities ahead.





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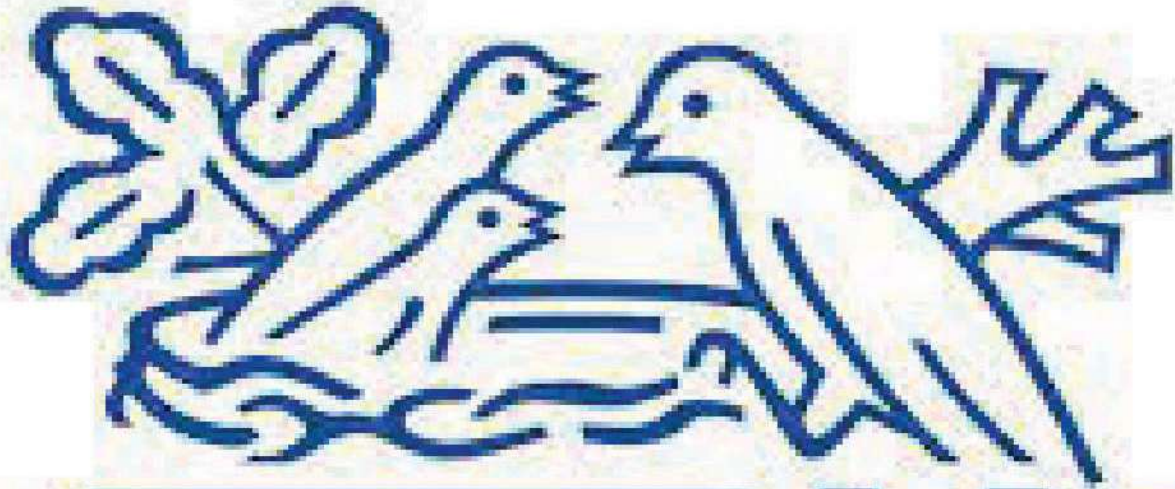


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