

SPELL

MAGAZINE

VOLUME 4



SPRING
2025

Capital University of Science and Technology
Department of English



Capital University of Science & Technology
Department of English
Students' Panel of English Literature and Linguistics



Editorial Board

PATRON-IN-CHIEF

Prof. Dr. Muhammad Mansoor Ahmed

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Dr. Muhammad Umar Farooq

EDITOR

Ms. Asma Qandeel

ASSISTANT EDITORS

Komal Naseer

Areeba Rasool

Malalai Noor Khan

GRAPHIC DESIGNERS

Malalai Noor Khan

Areeba Rasool





04 EDITOR'S NOTE

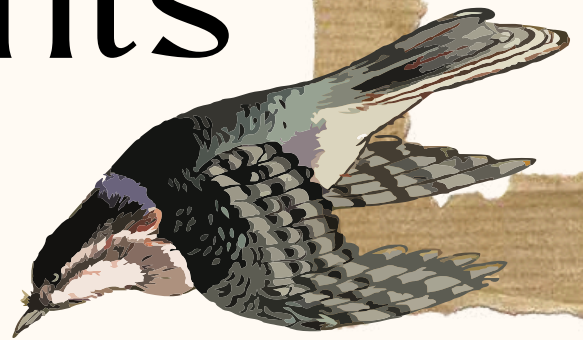
06 WOVEN WORDS

32 ESSAYS & EXPOSITIONS

38 CRITICS' CORNER



Table of Contents



41 POETRY BAR

59 LITERARY LOOP

63 THROUGH THE LENS

73 CANVAS CHAOS



Editor's Note

Dear readers, welcome to the Spring 2025 edition of SPELL Magazine, a tapestry of creativity, woven from the threads of imagination, innovation, and inspiration! In the third volume of our magazine, we invite you to embark on a thrilling adventure, navigating the uncharted waters of the human experience. Within these pages, you shall discover a kaleidoscope of artistic expression, as our talented contributors bare their souls, sharing their innermost thoughts, emotions, and visions. Prepare to be enchanted by the poetic verse that dances across the page, the prose that whispers secrets in your ear, and the artwork that transports you to realms both familiar and unknown.

As you dive into the depths of our magazine, may the words and images ignite a fire within your soul, rekindling your passion for the literary arts, and reminding you of the transformative power of creativity. We extend our deepest gratitude for your loyalty and support, and we trust that this edition shall be a treasured addition to your literary collection. At SPELL Magazine, we are unwavering in our commitment to showcasing raw, original, and innovative content, spanning the vast expanse of art, photography, poetry, and prose. We believe that our readers deserve only the best, and we strive to deliver a publication that not only inspires but also provokes, challenges, and delights.

So, dear readers, join us on this fantastical journey, as we celebrate the magic of words, and the boundless potential of the human spirit. Happy reading, and may the creative spark within these pages illuminate your path, and guide you on your own literary odyssey!

Asma Qandeel

LECTURER





"We are all in the gutter,
but some of us are looking
at the stars."

-Oscar Wilde



WOVEN WORDS

EMPATHY: KNOWN TO THE MIND, UNFELT BY THE HEART



Rida Haroon Khan
BBT241020

Empathy, a well-known word but not a well-felt emotion. One fine morning, I saw my parents having an argument in the kitchen. I went there and realized they were arguing about how my father was not managing his finances accordingly. I asked my mother that why does she even care about my father's expenses or the way he handles his finances.

She replied, "He earns for us, he spends on us, but in between forgets how to spend accordingly, he works hard. But when he doesn't care about his hard money, I feel like it's unjust to him and I can't tolerate it, even though it's his money, but it's not his struggle alone to earn. I, some days, wait till late for him to return so we can have dinner together. Some days, I have to wake up at the crack of dawn to prepare his lunch and breakfast."

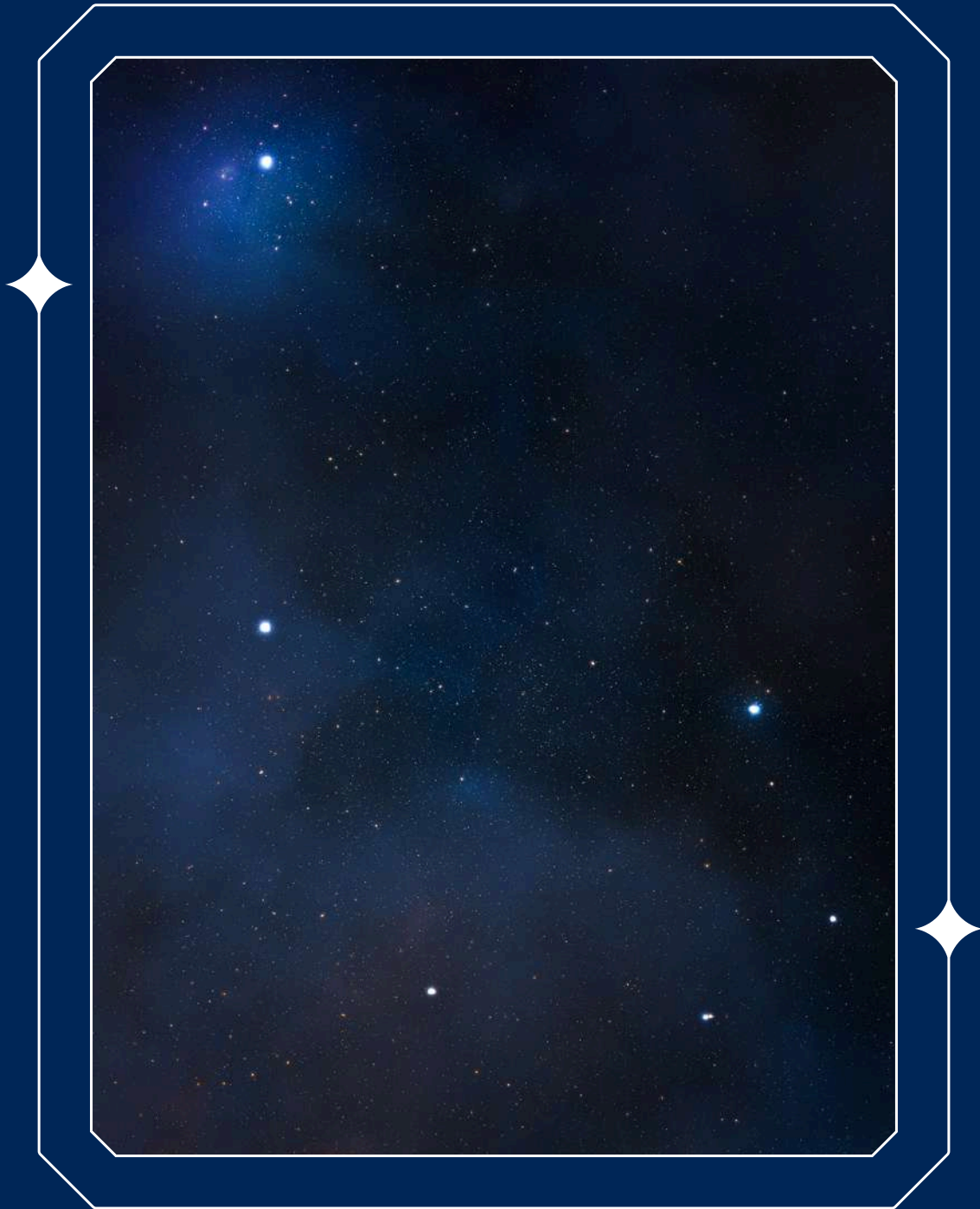
She wiped her hands on her apron, her voice cracking, "I am not saying it's the money that matters. It's the effort he and I put behind it. How even at the age at which his back hurts from sitting for a long period of time, whereas his ankles get swollen due to poor blood circulation, but yet he goes to work every morning and every evening and returns with a smile that makes his suffering look a lot more bearable while I prepare his breakfast, lunch and dinner religiously so he can keep going so you guys can have a better life. Together, with years of effort, we have brought up our children and have made this house a home for us."

With that reply her words jolted me, peeling back layers of complacency I'd worn for years while not realizing for how long I have lived with these privileges that I have totally forgotten about how much effort it takes to comfortably live. Well, after that reply, nothing changed. Not the banters my father and mother still had over finances or regarding household issues, yet that night, I sat in front of my untouched dinner, a meal that came from swollen ankles and sleepless dawns, which changed my perspective on how privileged I am rather than the ordinary I use to think of.

Life's phases circle us back to truths we've always ignored that were there from the beginning. I might have taken my privileges for granted, but many have looked upon them as luxuries which at every step makes me realize that empathy is a well-known word but not a well-felt emotion.



ECHOES OF CELESTIAL CATASTROPHE



Abdulmoeen Faisal
BPH233084

CHAPTER 1: CELESTIAL BOND

In the distant future, humanity thrives on a transformed Earth, forever altered by a cataclysmic event known as the Celestial Catastrophe. Ages ago, Earth was tethered to a skeletal celestial body, its existence shattered in mystery. But when that celestial shattered in the fury of a supernova explosion, Earth was left forever changed.

In the year 2247, Earth stood at the brink of a new era, its skies glowing with the remnants of a celestial body long thought lost to the history. For Maya Vasquez, a young scientist with a passion for unraveling the mysteries of the universe, the sight was both inspiring and unsettling. As Maya watched from the observatory above the cliffs overlooking the city, she couldn't shake the feeling that something amazing was about to unfold.

Maya had always been drawn to the stars, ever since she was a child gazing up at the night sky with wonder. But this sight was different. The celestial remnants were a mystery, a puzzle waiting to be solved, and Maya was determined to uncover their secrets.

The celestial remnants twinkled like diamonds against the dark canvas of space, filling Maya with a sense of wonder and curiosity. She couldn't help but wonder what secrets lay hidden within those distant stars and what they could teach her about the world around her.

As Maya watched, she felt a sense of longing for something more, something beyond the limits of Earth. Little did she know that her journey was just beginning, and that the mysteries of the cosmos would soon take her into the unknown.

CHAPTER 2: THE WANDERER'S MANUSCRIPT

With the image of the celestial remnants burned into her mind, Maya returned to her laboratory, determined to uncover the truth behind this cosmic phenomenon. As she went over her research notes and studied the data collected from telescopes and satellites, she couldn't shake the feeling that there was more to the story than what met the eye.

In her quest for answers, Maya found herself drawn to the archives of the scientific institute where she worked. Kept away in the dimly lit chambers, among the shelves lined with dusty books and ancient scrolls, she stumbled upon a manuscript that would change everything.

The manuscript was written by a mysterious figure known as the Wanderer who spoke of a cosmic bond between Earth and the celestial body. According to the Wanderer's writings, the celestial body was not simply a distant object in the sky, but a long-lost part of Earth itself, torn by the forces of nature and thrown deep into the universe.

As Maya searched deeper into the manuscript, she found herself captivated by the Wanderer's words. He spoke of a time when Earth and the celestial body had been connected by a cosmic thread, a bond that had been severed by a cataclysmic event a long time ago. But the Wanderer believed that the connection still existed, waiting to be resurrected by those who are brave enough to seek it out.

Excited by this surprising fact, Maya went more deep into the the manuscript, studying its every word in search of clues that could unlock the mysteries of the celestial remnants. Could it be that the Wanderer held the key to understanding their true nature?

CHAPTER 3: JOURNEY INTO THE UNKNOWN

Determined to uncover the secrets hidden within the celestial remnants, Maya gathers her companions and sets out on a journey across the fractured landscape of Earth. Their path is fraught with danger and uncertainty, yet Maya's resolve remains unwavering as they went deeper into the unknown.

Their first destination is a desolate wasteland where one of the largest fragments of the celestial body has crashed to Earth. As they approach the site, they are met with a scene of devastation—a landscape scarred by the impact of the cosmic event.

Undeterred by the wreckage, Maya and her companions begin their investigation, scouring the area for any signs of the celestial body's influence. Among the debris, they discover remnants of advanced technology and strange artifacts, each hinting at the true nature of the celestial bond.

But their journey is far from over. As they press onward, they encounter fierce storms, treacherous terrain, and hostile wildlife, each obstacle testing their strength and determination. Yet amidst the challenges, Maya remains steadfast in her quest, fueled by a sense of purpose and a thirst for knowledge.

As they journey deeper into the heart of the celestial remnants, Maya and her companions uncover traces of an ancient civilization that once flourished across the cosmos. Ruins of towering cities and crumbling monuments dot the landscape, silent witnesses to the cataclysmic event that had befallen their world.

In their exploration of the ancient ruins, Maya and her companions uncover clues about the civilization's fate—a race of beings who had faced their own reckoning, brought low by the same cosmic forces that had reshaped Earth. Yet amidst their downfall, they had left behind a legacy of knowledge, hidden within the fragments of their shattered world.

Armed with this newfound understanding, Maya and her companions press onward, their determination unshaken by the trials they have faced. For they know that the answers they seek lie just beyond the horizon, waiting to be discovered amidst the remnants of a cosmic event that had changed the course of history.

CHAPTER 4: THE SECRETS WITHIN

Maya and her team pressed further into the heart of the wastelands, where the fragments of the celestial body were most concentrated. Each step revealed more clues about the strange and ancient object that had crashed into Earth. The landscape was eerie—a mix of Earth's rugged terrain and the foreign material from the celestial remnants, creating a surreal environment of towering, shattered structures that gleamed under the sun.

One day, while scouring a particularly dense region of debris, the team stumbled upon something astonishing. Hidden within a canyon, buried beneath layers of cosmic dust and overgrown vegetation, they uncovered a massive, metallic structure. The ruin was enormous, unlike anything constructed by human hands. Its smooth surface shimmered with an ethereal glow, reflecting the colors of the sky in an otherworldly way. Strange, glowing symbols were carved into its walls, swirling in patterns that no one could decipher.

Maya's heart raced as they approached the structure. Her instincts told her they were standing on the edge of a discovery that could change everything. This wasn't just debris from space—it was a remnant of an ancient, highly advanced civilization, one that had perhaps inhabited the celestial body before its catastrophic demise.

Inside, the ruins were vast and maze-like, full of hallways and chambers, some collapsed and others intact. As the team ventured deeper, they found relics of advanced technology—devices that defied explanation, pulsing with energy despite the apparent centuries of disuse. At the center of the ruin, they came across a massive chamber containing a large, dormant machine. It was surrounded by inscriptions and machinery unlike anything Maya had ever seen.

Maya was awestruck. The celestial body wasn't just a piece of rock; it had been home to a civilization with knowledge far beyond what humans possessed. Now, the only question was: what had happened to them, and what secrets had they left behind for her to uncover?

CHAPTER 5: RIVAL FRACTIONS

As word of Maya's discoveries spread, the remnants of the celestial body became the center of growing interest. What had begun as a quiet research mission was now the subject of global attention, attracting not only scientists and researchers but also those with more sinister motives. Various factions emerged, each determined to claim the technology and power hidden within the fragments for their own purposes.

Maya had always known that knowledge had value, but she hadn't anticipated the scale of the conflict that was about to unfold. One of the first groups to contact her was the Earth Defense Coalition (EDC), an organization supposedly dedicated to using new technologies to strengthen humanity's defenses against potential extraterrestrial threats. At first, their offer to help seemed genuine, but Maya sensed their true agenda—to weaponize the advanced alien technology they had barely begun to understand.

On the opposite side was the Unity for Cosmic Harmony (UCH), a peaceful faction that believed the celestial remnants were a gift, offering a way to elevate humanity's consciousness and spiritual growth. They wanted Maya's research to be shared openly, not monopolized by any government or private entity. However, their naive idealism made them vulnerable to manipulation, and Maya feared they underestimated the potential dangers of what lay within the celestial fragments.

Caught in the middle, Maya struggled to keep control of her findings. Both factions tried to sway her, promising protection, funding, or freedom to pursue her research. But as tensions escalated, it became clear that neither side truly cared about understanding the deeper mysteries of the celestial body—they were focused on their own goals, and that was a dangerous game.

Maya's team was soon thrust into a web of political intrigue, with both factions watching their every move. As the pressure mounted, she realized that her mission wasn't just about unlocking the celestial body's secrets—it was about ensuring that knowledge didn't fall into the wrong hands, for the sake of all humanity.

CHAPTER 6: BETRAYAL AND CONFLICT

Tensions within Maya's team had been building ever since the rival factions began circling. The constant pressure from the Earth Defense Coalition (EDC) and Unity for Cosmic Harmony (UCH) weighed on everyone, but Maya had no idea how deeply the strain had affected one of her closest colleagues.

It happened late at night, as the team was camped near the ruins of the alien structure. Maya and the others were deep in their work, trying to decipher the strange glyphs they had discovered when a sudden commotion broke the quiet. Alarms blared, lights flickered, and before they could react, armed forces from the EDC stormed the camp.

Maya's heart pounded as she ducked behind a metal structure, trying to make sense of the ambush. How had they found them so quickly? The answer became clear moments later when Dr. Arlo, one of her most trusted team members, emerged from the shadows, standing beside the EDC officers. His face was full of regret, but the truth was undeniable—he had betrayed them.

"I'm sorry, Maya," Arlo said, his voice shaking. "They promised us protection, funding—everything we need to understand this. We can't do this alone."

Betrayed, Maya felt a mix of anger and sorrow, but there was no time to dwell on it. The EDC wasn't interested in negotiation. They wanted the alien technology, and they were willing to take it by force. Chaos erupted as the soldiers began ransacking the camp, looking for any devices or data that could give them an edge. Maya and her remaining loyal team members fought back, using every resource they had. Makeshift weapons and gadgets they had salvaged from the ruins helped even the odds, but they were outnumbered and outgunned.

In the confusion, Maya realized their only chance was to escape into the alien structure and use its maze-like corridors to lose their attackers. With the EDC forces closing in, Maya led her team into the heart of the ruins, determined to protect the alien knowledge at all costs, even if it meant facing betrayal and danger at every turn.

CHAPTER 7: RACE FOR THE MACHINE

The atmosphere inside the ancient alien structure was suffocating, heavy with the weight of both the past and the impending danger. After the betrayal by Dr. Arlo and the ambush by the Earth Defense Coalition (EDC), Maya and her team had no choice but to press deeper into the ruins, hoping to evade capture. But as they ventured further, they stumbled upon something extraordinary—the heart of the alien technology: a massive, dormant machine hidden deep within the structure.

It was unlike anything they had seen—a towering device pulsing faintly with energy, its surface covered in strange, glowing symbols that appeared to be some form of control interface. This was no mere relic of the past; this machine still possessed power, and Maya knew instantly that both the EDC and the Unity for Cosmic Harmony (UCH) would stop at nothing to seize control of it.

Realizing the significance of the discovery, Maya's heart raced. The machine, based on preliminary scans, seemed to have the capability to manipulate matter and energy on an unprecedented scale. If it fell into the wrong hands, the consequences for Earth—and possibly the entire galaxy—could be catastrophic.

However, the alien machine wasn't the only thing pulsing with energy. Both factions had gotten wind of its existence. As Maya and her team tried to activate the machine, alarms went off throughout the ruins—both the EDC and UCH were closing in fast. The ruins became a battleground, with soldiers from the EDC and zealots from the UCH racing through the narrow corridors, both determined to claim the machine for their own purposes.

In the midst of it all, Maya's team had to navigate the complex alien systems while avoiding crossfire and sabotage attempts from both factions. They had no choice but to split up, with Maya leading one half of the team to find a way to safely control the machine while the others fended off their pursuers. The race was on, not just for survival, but for control over a piece of technology that could reshape the future of humanity—if it didn't destroy them all first.

CHAPTER 8: SHOWDOWN IN THE RUINS

The alien ruins, once a place of eerie silence and forgotten secrets, had become a war zone. Maya and her team were cornered, caught between two warring factions—the Earth Defense Coalition (EDC) and the Unity for Cosmic Harmony (UCH). Both groups were intent on seizing control of the dormant machine at the heart of the alien structure, a device capable of manipulating matter and energy in ways that defied understanding.

As Maya's group scrambled to secure their position, the machine roared to life with a hum of energy. Its towering presence cast an ominous glow over the ruins, as if it had sensed the impending chaos. The machine was a relic of a long-lost civilization, and Maya still didn't fully comprehend its true purpose. But what was clear was that its power was vast, and if the wrong hands gained control, the consequences could be catastrophic.

The EDC, led by a ruthless commander named General Ryker, launched a full assault. Their troops, armed with advanced military technology, stormed the ruins with the precision of a well-oiled war machine. They had one goal: to weaponize the alien device and use it to bolster Earth's defenses, no matter the cost.

On the other side, the UCH zealots, led by the fanatical leader Elara, were equally determined. They believed the machine was a key to enlightenment, a divine gift that could elevate humanity to a higher state of existence. However, their methods were no less violent. They clashed with EDC forces at every turn, wielding alien artifacts and weaponry they had scavenged from the ruins.

In the middle of this maelstrom, Maya and her team were forced to fight for survival. Using the alien technology they had studied, they created makeshift shields and weapons, struggling to hold off both sides. The once peaceful ruins echoed with the sounds of gunfire, explosions, and the crackling energy of the alien machine.

But the greatest danger came not from the factions themselves, but from the machine. As the battle raged on, it began to activate more fully, its power growing unstable. Maya realized that unless they could shut it down or control it, the entire structure—and everyone in it—could be destroyed.

Desperate, Maya and a few of her remaining team members fought their way through the chaos toward the machine's core. But both the EDC and UCH forces had the same idea. In a final, tense standoff within the heart of the ruins, Maya found herself facing both General Ryker and Elara, each determined to claim the alien technology for their own.

With time running out and the machine spiraling out of control, Maya was forced to make a choice that could change the fate of Earth—and perhaps the entire galaxy. Would she be able to stop the machine before it unleashed its full destructive potential, or would the factions tear each other apart in their quest for power? The fate of humanity hung in the balance.

CHAPTER 9: CATASTROPHE AND REVELATION

The alien machine, now fully active, pulsed with an ominous glow, casting long shadows across the crumbling ruins. Maya could feel the immense energy radiating from it, the air itself vibrating as the ancient technology began to spiral out of control. The battle between the Earth Defense Coalition (EDC) and the Unity for Cosmic Harmony (UCH) faded into the background as the machine's power became the true threat.

As Maya desperately worked to decipher the alien symbols on the control panels, the ground beneath them began to quake. The machine's energy was destabilizing the environment around it, triggering tremors that rippled through the structure. Cracks snaked up the walls, and pieces of debris began to fall, adding to the chaos.

"We're running out of time!" shouted one of Maya's team members, his voice barely audible over the escalating noise of the machine.

General Ryker and Elara, both equally consumed by their desire to control the machine, continued to argue, each convinced that they alone could harness its power. But Maya knew better. The machine wasn't a simple weapon or tool—it was something far more complex, and its activation without understanding was causing a catastrophic reaction.

Suddenly, a blinding flash of light erupted from the machine's core, sending shockwaves through the ruins. Several of the EDC and UCH soldiers were thrown back, the force of the energy overwhelming their defenses. Maya barely managed to shield herself as the blast subsided, but she knew this was only the beginning. If the machine fully destabilized, it could destroy not only the ruins but the surrounding area—and perhaps far beyond.

Maya's mind raced. She needed to find a way to shut it down, but the alien technology was far beyond her understanding. Yet in that moment, something clicked—an insight from the Wanderer's manuscript she had studied back at the lab. The key wasn't in controlling the machine for human purposes but in allowing it to return to its natural state.

With a mixture of hope and fear, Maya made a bold decision, one that could either save them all—or doom them.

CHAPTER 10: THE ECHO OF UNITY

The ruins trembled as the alien machine's energy spiraled toward catastrophic levels. The air was thick with tension, and Maya felt the weight of the entire situation pressing down on her. She had no time left. The machine, with its immense and uncontrollable power, was on the verge of unleashing devastation not just on the ruins, but potentially across the entire region. Maybe even beyond.

Her mind raced back to the Wanderer's manuscript, to the cryptic lines she had puzzled over for weeks. The message wasn't about wielding power, but about unity. The machine, created by a long-lost civilization, wasn't meant to be a weapon of destruction—it was a device meant to bridge worlds, connect civilizations, and foster harmony. It wasn't malfunctioning because it was broken; it was reacting to the chaotic and conflicting energies of the factions vying for control.

Maya knew what had to be done.

Ignoring the chaos around her, she sprinted toward the machine's core, shouting instructions to her team to hold back both the Earth Defense Coalition (EDC) and Unity for Cosmic Harmony (UCH) forces. As General Ryker and Elara continued their heated struggle for dominance, Maya climbed into the heart of the machine, her fingers brushing over the alien control panel.

With a deep breath, she began to deactivate the machine—not by force, but by allowing its systems to return to equilibrium. The key was not control but harmony. She input the sequence she had deciphered from the manuscript, and for a moment, nothing happened. The tremors grew stronger, and the air crackled with energy.

Then, with a soft hum, the machine's power began to subside. The glowing symbols dimmed, and the quaking earth grew still. Maya exhaled in relief. The machine had returned to its dormant state, its energy neutralized.

The factions, stunned by what had just occurred, stopped their fighting. The ruins were quiet once more. Maya stood amidst the silence, realizing the deeper truth—the celestial bond wasn't just a connection between technology and power, but a reflection of the unity between all living beings.

As Maya's team regrouped, both General Ryker and Elara lowered their weapons, their ambitions quelled by the realization of what they had nearly unleashed. They left the ruins in an uneasy truce, each faction walking away with a newfound respect for the power they had sought to claim.

Maya looked up at the sky, the alien remnants still hanging over Earth like a watchful sentinel. The mystery of the celestial body was far from over, but for now, she had stopped the destruction. More than that, she had learned that the key to the universe wasn't dominance or control—it was balance.

And with that revelation, her journey had only just begun.



THE DANDELION SEASON



Lareb Manzoor
BCY241015

Some stories aren't meant to return to where they began. Like dandelion seeds, they drift, softly, hopefully, toward what might be. This is a story of Ayla and Rayan, of silent strength, missed timing, and love that blooms not in possession, but in peace.

Ayla grew up in a grand home where noise replaced affection and expectations eclipsed love. Emotionally distant parents and indifferent siblings made her retreat into silence, befriend forgotten things, dead flowers, broken toys, because she, too, often felt forgotten. But childhood offered a single spark: a chubby boy once asked her to race on a swing. She laughed, truly, for the first time. Then he vanished, but the memory never did.

Years later, in a quaint university town scented with coffee and old books, Ayla arrived with quiet hopes. Though beautiful and kind, she often remained an outsider, finding comfort in solitary cafés and greenhouse visits. One day, a loud boy in a black tracksuit bumped her table. Rayan, chaotic, magnetic, made a messy first impression. She ignored him.

Fate, however, had other plans. They kept colliding: in hallways, the library, even the carnival. Ayla, uncomfortable in crowds, began to unravel amidst neon lights and noisy joy, until Rayan noticed. He stayed beside her, cracked jokes, and saw the fear she didn't speak. When a storm broke and she had no ride, he drove her home. That night, she cried for the first time in years and Rayan simply let her. He didn't try to fix it. He just stayed.

Their connection grew quietly. At the greenhouse, where Ayla nursed plants and pain, her old gardener Mr. Clean offered her wisdom wrapped in soil and silence: "Sadness means you're still alive."

She whispered like a mother scolding her children.

"The leaves are dying... my children are dying. How could I be so ignorant?"

Mr. Clean, her ever-faithful gardener, turned from the corner, gloves stained with soil. "Ma'am, they'll grow back. Stronger than before. Everything that dies lives again, in some way."

Ayla's gaze dropped. "Will that bring my grandfather back?" The words escaped before she could catch them.

Mr. Clean paused. Then exhaled slowly, pulling off one glove as he sat beside her on the greenhouse bench.

"Madam... death doesn't mean gone."

He looked out at the misty glass panes and continued quietly.

"When your grandfather hired me, I was just a kid. Eleven years old. Lost my parents. I had a little sister, my only family. After our parents died, I thought I'd never smile again. I told him once... and you know what he said?"

Ayla looked up, eyes glassy.

"You're not dying, you know," he said. "When my wife died, I thought I would. I thought I already had. Walking around, invisible, dead to the world. But then I learned something, if it hurts that much, it means you're still alive. And if you're alive, you can still feel joy again. Sadness just means you're still here."

Mr. Clean's voice cracked, but he kept going.

"Dead doesn't mean gone," he said. "I still feel her every day. I talk to her in my quiet moments. I live because she would want me to. I stay strong... for Ayla. For you. So don't disappear into sadness. Someone needs you to stay, too."

The greenhouse went still. Ayla's hands trembled in her lap. And then she broke. Quiet tears. Deep sobs. She stood up quickly and walked out without a word. Mr. Clean watched her go, heart aching, he knew what he had stirred.

She began to soften. But Rayan had his own wounds. His childhood was broken by divorce, separation, and emotional neglect. He had come to this town Alisha's town, his estranged sister, hoping to reconnect. Ayla had been a beautiful coincidence... or maybe something more.

Their growing closeness met a sudden pause. On the university field trip, under bonfires and laughter, Rayan told stories about burning old bones letting go of pain." Oh, I love a bonfire, I do. Reminds me of being a little boy again. You know, in the old days... they used to build giant bonfires at this time of year, and talk about the people they'd lost. Toss in offerings to drive away evil spirits, old bones, mostly. That's why it's called a bonfire, from the old English 'bone fire'. Build a pile of old bones and burn away the shadows. Because from here on in, the shadows get deeper... the nights get longer. We're heading into the dark. And we have to hang onto each other. Because we can only carry so much. So... anyone got any old bones to throw?"

Ayla listened, captivated. In the quiet moments, she almost reached for his hand. Almost. But before anything could deepen, he disappeared.

The next day, the field trip ended. Sweet goodbyes. Shared playlists. Group selfies.

A few days later, Ayla stood in her greenhouse watering her beloved Tisha, her grandfather's plant, humming softly to herself.

Then a knock.

Rayan.

"I need to talk," he said.

"I'm with my children," she replied, not looking up. "Please let me enjoy my peace."

"Then I'll wait," he said, settling onto a bench. "I'll be the cool uncle. I bet they'll like me better anyway."

"Who even invited you here?" she muttered. "We're not even friends."

Rayan fell quiet. The rejection stung. But he stayed.
Minutes passed. Ayla spoke softly to her plants, smiling at Tisha.

Then Rayan's voice cut through. "Isn't it strange... how people never quite feel worth it? But plants, you pour your love into them, and they show you exactly where it goes. You watch them grow. It all makes sense. Everyone else feels... exhausting. Even the good ones. But once in a blue, goddamn moon, someone... like this moonflower... might be worth the effort."

Ayla turned, stunned.
"What did you want to tell me?"

Rayan's smile faded.
"I'm leaving. Tonight."
"Where? Another party?" she teased half-heartedly.

He didn't answer.
He just... looked at her. Long enough to say everything he didn't. Then left.

No goodbye. No explanation. Ayla was shattered. The silence screamed louder than closure ever could. Months passed. Graduation came. Alisha got engaged. At the wedding, Ayla stepped out for air and saw Rayan. He was back, dressed in ivory, standing beneath the stars. Her heart trembled.

"You okay?" he asked.
"No."
"Want me to make you laugh again?"
"Why did you come back?" Tears spilled as years of heartbreak, confusion, and hope erupted from her chest.

Why did he leave? Why had he entered her life just to vanish?

Rayan finally spoke. His father had fallen ill, then passed. He had to choose family. But he had remembered her every day the girl who made silence feel like home. He had searched for her long before they met. She had been the girl on the swing. He had planned their encounters, desperate to feel close to someone who might understand his loneliness.

Ayla was stunned. That little boy... had been Rayan all along. They sat on those swings again, under moonlight. No dramatic promises. Just truth. Later, at the wedding, surrounded by love and lanterns, Ayla stood between Rayan and Alisha, at peace.

He had written once: "You don't have to answer. If it takes this long, that's an answer too."

She had chosen peace. She had chosen herself. Because sometimes love doesn't end in forever. Sometimes, it ends in release with dandelion wishes sent into the wind, whispering: I loved you. That was enough. The rest is confetti.

FROM SHADOWS TO LIGHT



Areeba Rasool
BEN233006

From the outside, Zaid's life appeared perfect. Born into a wealthy family in Jhang, a city in Pakistan, traditionally believed to be where Heer and Ranjha, two legendary lovers from Punjabi folklore, are buried. He had everything a child could wish for. But behind the glory of his family's mansion lay a dark and chaotic world. Zaid's story is a stark reminder that wealth doesn't shield one from life's harsh realities.

Zaid's parents, Aziz and Asma, were cousins who married at their parents' insistence. Their marriage started with excitement and lavish trips around the world. However, once their honeymoon phase ended, the cracks in their relationship began to show. When Zaid was born three years into their marriage, he was a beacon of hope for a brief period. Asma poured all her love into raising him, but Aziz's attention strayed. He indulged in extramarital affairs and engaged in constant fights with Asma, creating a toxic home environment.

Growing up, Zaid was exposed to relentless arguments and witnessed his father's numerous vices. Aziz often blamed Zaid for his own failures, adding to the boy's burden. Feeling neglected and desperate for an escape, Zaid found solace with friends Amir, Naeem, and Umar. These friends introduced him to a world of drugs and crime. He started with marijuana, then moved on to ecstasy, cocaine, heroin, and methamphetamine. His life spiraled out of control as he attended wild parties and distanced himself from Allah, despite being a Muslim.

Zaid's school performance collapsed, and he adopted a threatening portrayal. He became involved in all sorts of illegal activities, using girls for his desires and manipulating others for his gain. His mother, Asma, remained clueless about his double life, while his father, Aziz, turned a blind eye, engaged in his own misdeeds. Zaid's actions mirrored Aziz's past, yet Aziz hypocritically blamed his son for everything.

One fateful night, Zaid's life took an unexpected turn. While at a hotel to meet a girl, he saw his younger sister, Arooba, with her boyfriend, Usama—Zaid's arch-enemy. Usama intended to exploit Arooba, and this realization hit Zaid hard. He stormed in, confronted Usama, and took his sister home. For the first time, Zaid felt the weight of his actions and their consequences. It was a moment of profound awakening.

Haunted by his past and desperate for redemption, Zaid decided to change. He sought forgiveness from Allah, dedicating his life to becoming a better Muslim. He cut ties with his toxic friends and returned to his faith, he immersed himself in prayer and study, striving to follow the teachings of Islam with sincerity and humility. His transformation was profound, as he became a beacon of guidance and support for those around him, using his past experiences to lead others away from the mistakes he once made. Zaid's business flourished, not just in material success, but in integrity and ethical practices, earning him respect and admiration from his community.

Despite his parents' divorce, Zaid found strength living with Asma and Arooba. Aziz, recognizing his own failures, began to support Zaid's endeavors. However, Zaid understood that true healing required forgiveness and self-improvement. He worked tirelessly to be a better person, driven by the desire to break the cycle of destruction that had plagued his family.

His life illustrates that every action, good or bad, eventually comes back to us, shaping our destiny. Through his struggles and transformation, Zaid learned the importance of faith, responsibility, and the impact of personal choices. Zaid's life became a testament to the power of faith and the possibility of redemption. He found peace in serving Allah, and his devotion inspired those who knew him. His story serves as a reminder that it's never too late to change and seek a better path. His story was no longer one of regret and misdeeds but that of hope and renewal. Zaid proved that no matter how far one strays, the path to forgiveness and righteousness is always open. Through his journey, he showed that true leadership lies in humility, and true success is found in serving a higher purpose.



THE JIRGA



Imran Zarif
BEN213040

The village baithak, under an old tree, had seen hundreds of men's faces, gathering here every Sunday. It was a place of memories, laughter and the clatter of sharp cards against the wooden table. It used to be filled by the thick layers of smoke with the scent of tobacco. Sunday always had a winner and a crushed soul inside a broken loser. Amar, my brother, popular name of that village, with long hair often fell on his sharp-featured face was a local transport bus driver. We were four people in the home, Amar, my old father_trapped between life and death, Amar's wife and I_the quiet shadow of your home. But Amar did not belong to that world of our home. His place was elsewhere, in the baithak, where the shuffle of cards made his blood rush. Amar drove Malak Saab's bus. He spent his entire day in a metal cage of noise, sweat, and unending shouts. By evening, completely exhausted, but before going home, he was supposed to stop at Malak Saab's hujra to settle the day's earnings. Malak used to hand over Amar his decided wages_just enough to keep him going, and kept the rest in his pocket.

At home, Amar's terror ruled the house. His meal had to be on the table within five minutes of his arrival, or Bhabhi and I would face his aggressive reaction. His bread had to be different from others, perfectly rounded, neither burnt nor undercooked. Any flaw, any delay, and he would start beating and abusing us. This was his unchanging routine for all the days of the week. But Sundays were a bit different. Sunday evening belonged to the baithak, to cigarettes, hashish and to the cards.

It was the middle of Ramadan, a hot summer day. I was wet in sweat and frustration grew with the weight of fasting. The time for azan was near, and I was in a hurry towards my home for Iftar. On the way, I lost control on the bus and crashed into another vehicle as I was talking on the phone. The bus was badly damaged from the front, though I remained safe with only a bruise on my left hand. After settling the matter with the other driver, I went straight to Malak Saab's hujra. Malak Saab was busy in a photoshoot with homeless people who were invited in the hujra for Iftar. Malak Saab became very angry as I told him the situation. His voice rose, furious, and asked the guard to take the keys of the bus back. Took all the earnings of the day and demanded me to pay for the repairs. He asked the guard if I failed to come up with the money within one week, then seize my house and throw my family out of the village.

Almost an hour had passed after Azan by the time I finally reached home. I was very hungry, but his mind was in fear and anxiety. I drank a few sips of water, then headed towards the baithak. It was Sunday, and I had only one thought—gambling might be my only way out. I went to baithak and took my seat. My forehead glistened with sweat due to the burden which Malak Saab had put on my shoulders. Tonight, I had no thoughts but to win. I had already lost my savings and my wristwatch. My Anxiety increased as I threw my final bet onto the floor_my house. The others started exchanging words about my madness, knowing that it could lead to huge loss for me as I had a family living in that home. The game began. Each card flipped was like a direct strike on my heart. My chances withered with every move in the game as I was mentally not in the game. The final stage of the game came. The winning card was revealed, my heart started pumping higher. And then, I lost. The whole baithak burst into laughter, mocking me. The winner, Kaleem, leaned back on the floor and screamed with joy and pride. "Well, Amar, you look like a homeless person," he whispered in my ear.

"This was not fair," I muttered. My voice was shaking.

Kaleem raised an eyebrow. "Fair? You played the game. You lost the game. That's the rule."

I was not ready to agree. I had noticed a man whispering to Kaleem and signalling him throughout the game. It was a complete setup to trick me.

"You cheated," I shot up from my seat, knocking on a cup of tea. "You all were in on this!"

They started laughing at me. Kaleem stood from his seat, "look at your mouth, Amar. Rules are rules. And this is what our fathers have passed us."

I was thinking of my family. "You think you can take everything from me?" I shouted.

Kaleem stepped closer. "No Amar, no. It's not just a house, it's your pride too. I may visit your family first, make sure they know their place."

It was like a thunderstorm on my head. My hand went straight to my pocket, rounded my fingers on the handle of the knife I always carried. Without thinking for a second time, without hesitation, I sank the knife in Kaleem's chest. Everything froze for a moment. Kaleem staggered back, eyes wide with disbelief. Everyone stared at me, blood pooled on the floor. Then_noise, pushing, panic.

It was six o'clock in the morning when I woke up after the sehri. My eyes were not fully opened but I quickly jumped out of my bed as I had to polish Amar's shoes. I grabbed a cloth and started polishing them, knowing if they were not ready, the house would have shaken with his shouting. He hated delays, his breakfast, clothes, shoes, everything must be ready before he wanted it.

"Zehra, hurry up! He is ready to leave," my Bhabhi called from the room.

I rushed towards the room, holding his shoes tightly. As I entered, I noticed something different. Amar was not as usual, restless and demanding. He sat with a still and heavy face, which was something unfamiliar to us. He was not looking upward into our eyes. I placed the shoes on the floor, waited to hear something from him. I had no guts to ask him. I signalled Bhabhi to ask what had happened.

"I killed a man last night," he said in a low, shaking, burdened voice.

I felt like the ground had gone away from my feet and I had nothing to hold. My Bhabhi looked at me with wide, full of tears eyes without uttering a word. We were not able to ask him why and how?

"The jirga will decide my future today. It's at eleven, in the central hujra," he added after exhaling deeply.

He put his shawl over the shoulder and stood up and went out of the home with a miserable face.

The jirga started at eleven. The whole village had gathered under the dark cloudy sky in a wide circle. The elders, with white beards and turbans, sat in the centre with Kaleem's family on their right side. On the left side, my father and I sat in silence as the whole crowd was looking at us with anger.

The elder men began the jirga with a solemn pledge. One of them stood, raised his hand, the whole crowd went to a pen dropped silence. "Whatever the jirga decides will be the final decision. If anyone refuses, they will face the consequences," he added with a loud and commanding voice.

Both sides spoke. I told them the whole story that the game was not fair and my father pleaded for mercy. Kaleem's father demanded justice. I knew inside, my fate was out of my hands.

The elders whispered among themselves and then they gave the verdict. "Two paths lie before you," that man stood again and said with a firm voice. "You will be killed in retribution... Or your sister, Zehra, will be given as a wife to Kaleem's brother.

Right after the announcement of the verdict, my face lit up with relief. Without thinking for a second time, I asked a young boy sitting in the crowd, and whispered, "run home and give the good news to my wife and sister that my life is safe now. Jirga has decided that Zehra will have to marry Kaleem's brother, which is something we wanted."

My father and I turned to the elders, "we accept the second option," his voice steadier than his trembling hands. "Zehra will be given to Kaleem's brother."

The elders nodded and sealed the decision.

It was sharp 12 o'clock when I sat on Jayi Namaz, praying for my brother's safety. The rain had started_ air striking the walls of the house, dark clouds flying over our home. Every second felt like an eternity. Then, a sudden knock on the door hit our ears. I rushed towards the doors and opened it. A young boy breathing badly from running was behind.

"Amar Bhai sent me," he said, wiping the sweat from his forehead. "He asked me to tell you that his life is safe. The elders decided that his sister will have marry kaleem's brother, which is what we were looking for."

For a moment I felt a big relief as my brother was alive. My prayers were answered. But as I locked the door turned back, the boy's words sank in and the relief turned into suffocation. I smiled towards Bhabhi as she hugged me with a lively heart. No one thought what my life in Kaleem's house would be. To them, it was fair deal. I was a woman and women are destined to marriage. What did it mean if I was given away like a lost bet, as long as he was safe?

I felt like I was carrying the whole world on my shoulders. I was happy for my brother, but inside, I was restless, worried by the jirga decision. It was not a wedding but a punishment and I knew I had no option but to accept this punishment of my brother's gambling.

It was the first evening we all gathered again in the baithak after Kaleem's murder. The baithak was filled with smoke, laughter and hushed conversations. One of the boys leaned in, his voice slow and full of curiosity. "How will you handle the upcoming situation? You are going to marry your brother's murderer's sister and you already love a girl."

I laughed. "Handle? There is nothing to handle," I leaned back against the wooden pillar. "This is not a marriage. Let her come to my house. I will put her in her place."

They remained silent, waiting for me to further.

"Her life will be a battle field and she will be fighting alone. She will pay, slowly, for what her brother did," I added with a relief in my chest.

The baithak was filled with silence for a moment until one of them said slowly, "what about Unsha?"

"Unsha is the one I loved. I love. And I will love. She is the one I will marry. This other girl? She will live in my house, but as a servant, as a maid, not as a wife." I shrugged.

They nodded silently. To them it was a justice. To me, it was a revenge.

I was taken from my home like a dead body to its grave. No one spoke to me. No one looked at me. The faces were still and unreadable. When we arrived, they led me to a room with four plain walls without any decorations and welcoming gestures. I spent the night on the edge of the old wooden bed placed in the room. No one came to me all the night as if I did not exist. In sehri time, no one asked if I had eaten. No one even acknowledged that I was there.

It was exactly six o'clock, the door creaked open. A young man with a dark face, long hair and a cigarette in his hand stood in the door and spoke. "Get up. Go outside and clean the whole house. This is the first and last time I am saying. The house must spotless on this time every morning. After that, wash the dishes from last night's meal." His voice was emotionless like a robot. He did not wait for response, turned and walked away.

I sat there, staring at the mehndi-stained hands, my heart felt heavier than ever before.

What was he to me? What am I to him?

I had no answers. But long and dark stretched future ahead of me.

It had been almost 25 years since Zehra's marriage. I never met her in all that time_not even once. As the jirga had decided, I was not allowed to cross a specific boundary towards their house. So I never tried to meet. Life moved on. I had settled all the matters with Malak Saab. I had three children.

The sun was at its speak that day. I sat at a taxi adda, gossiping with my colleagues. My son ran toward me with a pale face.

"Baba... Dada is gone."

The words hit me like a storm. My father was gone.

The people in the neighbourhood were gathered in our home. As I sat near my father's bed, something shook me from inside _zehra. She must know. She must be here. This was her father too.

I called a boy and sent the message to tell her to come. This was the first time she was called home in the twenty-five years. The boy left. I waited and waited.

The boy returned alone. I stood and asked, "where is she."

"They said... Zehra told them she did not want to come. She is not feeling well," the boy said hesitantly. "Did you meet Zehra?" I asked with a doubt.

The boy furthered, "An old woman came out of the home and she did not let me enter the home."

A strange feeling of guilt hit me. For the first time in twenty-five years, I felt something was wrong. It was too late, but I realized something was not right with my sister Zehra.

The boy stood there as if he had forgotten something. He put his hand in the pocket and pulled out a piece of folded paper. "That woman gave me this paper," he said.

I took it hesitantly. I felt the paper heavy, heavier than a normal message.

I was on the bed. The room had always been dark, but today, it felt emptier than ever. I laid on the thin, old mattress, my body was nothing more than bones. Turning on a side felt like a battle for me. No one asked for food, water or anything. I had lived for twenty-five years in this house but it never felt like home. It has been a prison for me. I had to serve _still getting abused by everyone. I picked up a piece of paper with my weak hands, barely had the strength to hold a pen. My voice was taken long ago but I still kept the hope that this paper will reach my brother's hands. I started writing...

Bhai, Amar,

I will be gone by the time you read this. I never spoke to you so openly. But let me speak today, just for the first and the last time.

I have heard you are spending a very happy life with your children and your wife. I am happy for you. Truly, I am. At least one of us was allowed to live happily.

But Amar, do you remember the day you handed me over? Tell me. Do you remember how easily you decided my future without thinking for a second time? You had said it's a marriage and women are destined for marriage, right?

What kind of marriage was this?

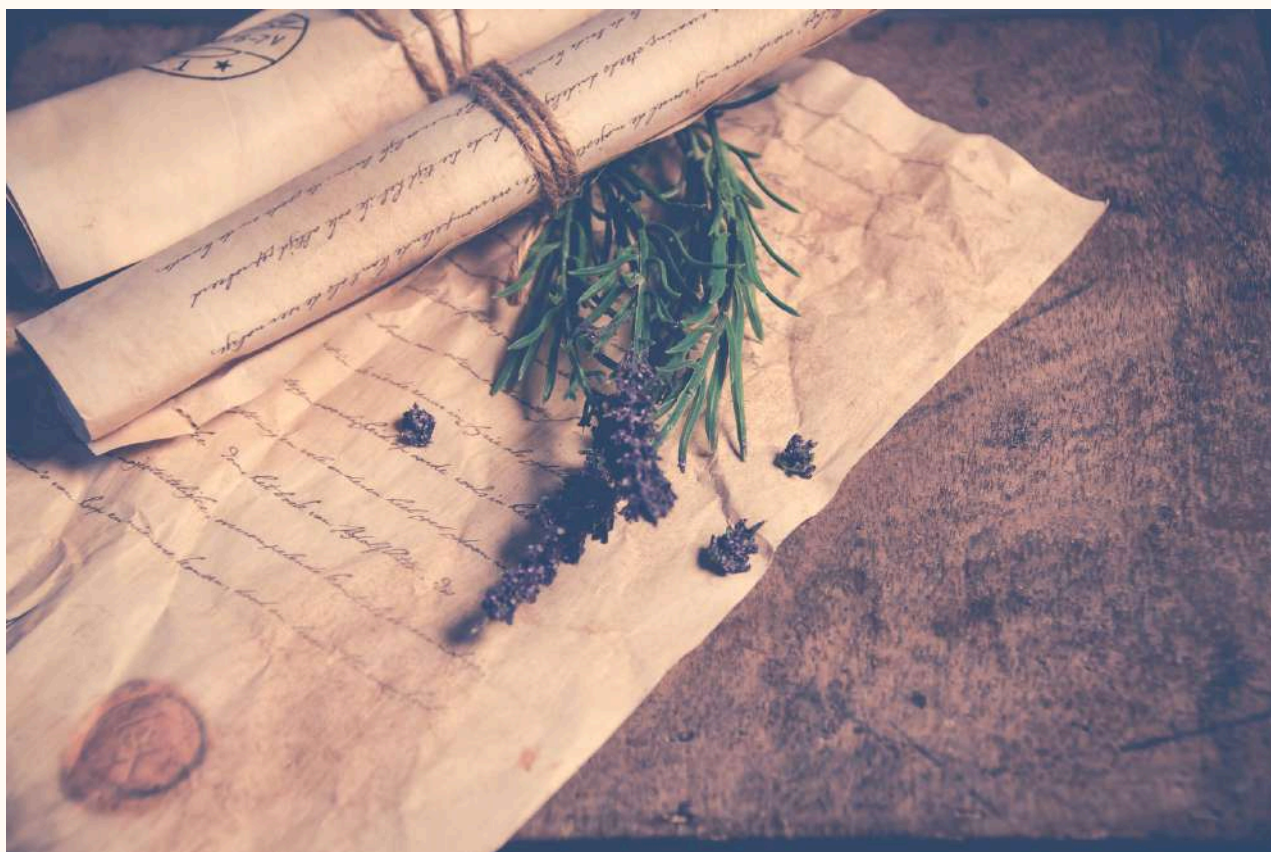
For twenty-five years, I have never sat on one table with my husband. He never ate with me. Never treated me as a wife. He married another girl right after my marriage. He never looked at me, never even spoke my name with his mouth. All I had to do here is washing, pressing, serving and obeying all the people in the house.

I have spent all these twenty-five years alone, wondering if you ever thought of me. If you ever realized what you had done.

Now, as I lie in bed, too weak, wishing for death. I know—I died the day you handed me over to them. I was buried long ago.

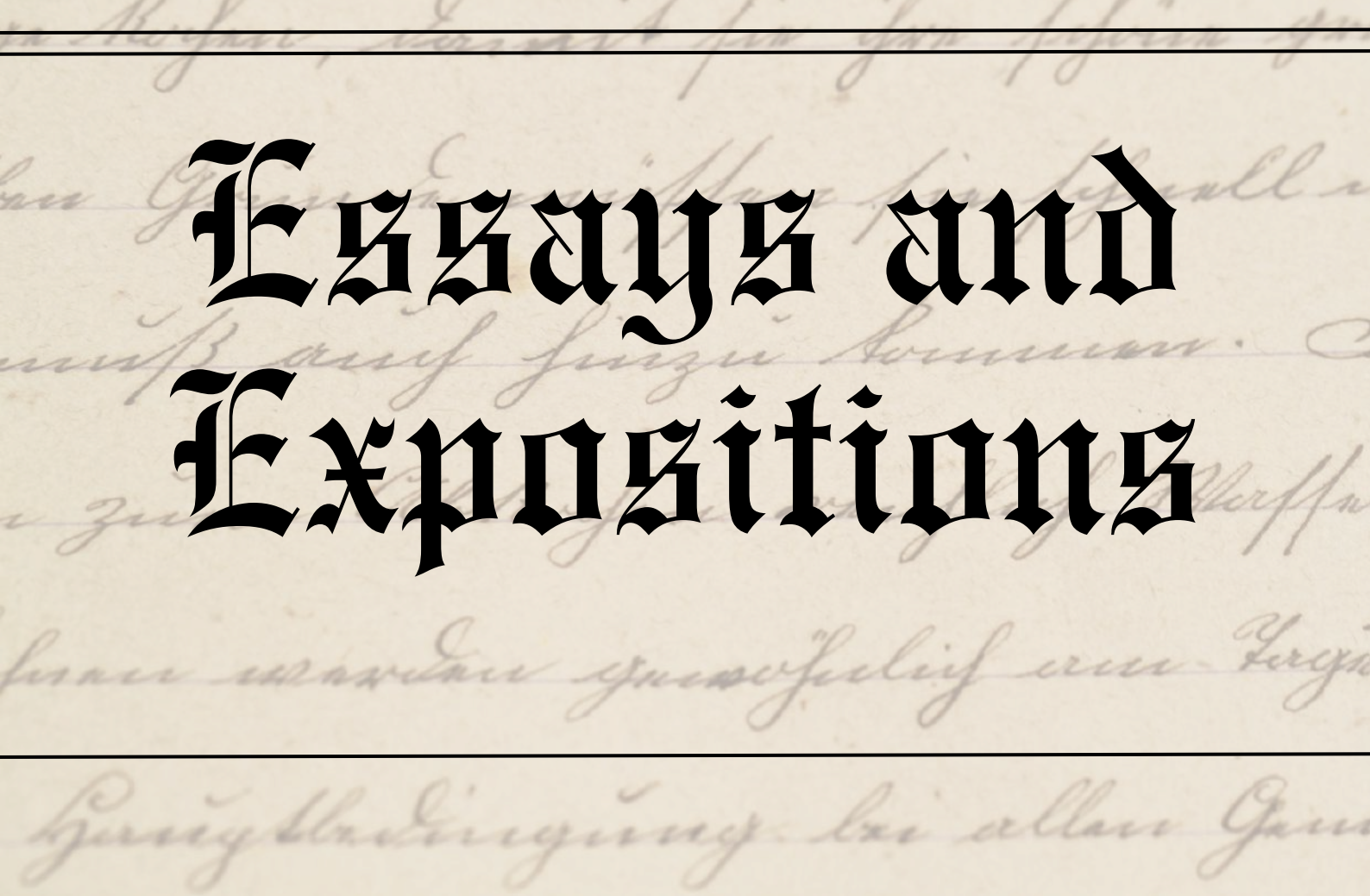
This is just the final shovel of dirt. And this shovel of dirt will be a relief. It will not be more difficult than what I suffered here in this.

Goodbye, Amar.





the right to write



Essays and Expositions

Where Life Meets Iman

Aneeqa Ali

BEN213008



Part 1: Life

Life never stays still. Time never stops and captures the sunny days forever, neither does it freeze on the blue hours. Time passes, and life goes on - through happy and sad days alike. There are blissful days when friends are by our side, things seem calm, and family matters are free from chaos. These moments are fleeting, meant to pass after a few happy selfies, cheers, and giggles.

Likewise, the melancholic days will also come to an end. When the sun sets, it may seem like it will never rise again, hiding away forever. But that's human nature. We think the bad days won't pass, haunting us forever. We just want them to leave, we want such moments to vanish as soon as possible.

But when it's time to say goodbye, or when its time to leave behind the bus which we entered to enjoy the most memorable trip of our life, or to close our favourite books after the last chapter ends, we try to hold on a bit longer, to keep that joy from slipping away.

We forget that a brighter, happier sun is waiting to rise again. We never try to think how we'll meet them in better days coming ahead, how another opportunity to make a new memory awaits us, and how a new book on our shelf is waiting to be picked for another wonderful experience.

We fail to understand that life is never a straight path or a smooth road without speed bumps. Life is, in fact, a broken road with bumps that shake us up and down. We must hold on to our surroundings to stay safe, to prevent ourselves from falling to the ground. But we must also let go of the small beautiful places on which we stop while passing. If we kept thinking of how beautiful those places are to be left behind, we may never see the beauty of the real destination. These happy, blissful moments are to be left behind. And as we learn to wait, we know that a brighter sun will rise again.

Part 2: Imaan

The nature of our imaan is like the nature of life. It isn't always on the peak of a beautiful mountain that we struggled half our lives to climb on. We try so hard to reach there and throughout this journey we fall so many times. We slip over and over again while reaching a peak which isn't in reality a peak but seems like one from where we stand and see it. There still is a long way to move higher and higher. As we reach that place we assume that we caught much of what was required to nourish our iman.

We think we've learned more than many others and that we're atleast better than "them", we start feeling "okay" with some of our bad habits which fills some pride inside us and we endup thinking we've reached above many points that we see below us. This thought of having been reached to a so called peak makes us look down. As we look down at how "WE" have struggled to reach there and "THEY" too could but didn't, an un perceived cycle of judgement begins. We start thinking about how they never tried to leave their sins the way we did, not knowing they might be struggling in other ways we never tried to.

Then guess what? The moment we look down, we FALL and lose the peak we somehow reached. We not only fall but lose our imaan. After falling when we start collecting the shattered pieces of our lost imaan we look at that mountain again and realize where we hardly reached was just a reflection of the real peak. Things come back to the point from where they began making us realize that the peak where we reached was just where the test started, with millions of levels still waiting above it. Thinking of this i thought of never looking down, never looking back, and to stay focused. Once we look back at what we left behind be it our sins, some old friends, or some alluring bad habits we slip and get into the old web again.

I think, we should just stay focused on what we've started, we must stick to our decisions and always stay humble enough to correct ourselves to climb higher on the levels of imaan. But if we don't do this, looking back or feeling proud will descend the level of our iman. Once this happens, everything will fall apart and so will we.

Part 3: Life and Imaan

I wrote about them together as I was thinking of how they both are so similar. How both of them give us the same message. Life tells us it never stays still, and moves on. It has necessary ups and downs. So does imaan. On some days it falls, on some it reaches the peaks. I believe we can find all the answers to our never ending questions regarding both of these by connecting them together. Life never stays the same. We have to pass on and leave some good people, places and books behind not to see better versions of them but to see various versions and numerous types of them to GROW. We forget that's important for us to become better versions of ourselves, we must mature and to grow and we have to see good and bad days for that. Some grey days too are important, where everything seems aimless. To find purpose in life, it's important to become aimless before that.

The same goes for imaan. For it to rise, it must fall. And for it to rise higher, it must fall from the highest peaks so that we can remember to stay humble, to stay focused and to stay consistent. Without experiencing the pain of losing our imaan, we cannot be strong enough to tightly hold it with focus and consistency the next time we get it. Without knowing that we too may fall, we may get arrogant and forget the essence of imaan. To understand all the layers of life and imaan, we need to connect them. A strong imaan teaches us to let go, because that's what the entire test of imaan is. And life too teaches us the art of letting go. So that's my theory that imaan is life and life is imaan. They both are two threads of the same fabric. Getting one and losing the other will disrupt the entire design of our being. So let's hold on to our iman to understand life in a better way. That's my struggle in life. Thus, to learn the "art of letting go".

Let Them and Let Yourself Be Free

Lareb Manzoor

BCY241015



Let people show you who they are. If they treat you poorly, let them. Not because it doesn't hurt, and not as an act of giving up, but because trying to manage or change people who have made a habit of hurting you is a trap with no end. You'll waste your energy explaining, rephrasing, trying to be clearer, softer, louder, hoping they'll understand. They won't. It's not a lack of comprehension. It's a lack of care.

People don't change because you explain things better. They change because they choose to. And if someone has already shown you that your feelings are negotiable, your needs inconvenient, and your presence optional, believe them.

The hardest truth? Sometimes, they simply don't care as deeply as you do. And no amount of empathy or loyalty can change that. You're not saving someone who's drowning. You're flailing in the water while they watch from the shore, calling it connection.

You think you're being kind. Patient. Emotionally generous. But often, what you call love is just a trauma response. When you're wired to find stability in chaos, inconsistency can feel like home. You fill in their silences with meaning.

You interpret absence as mystery. You turn neglect into "they're just going through something."

You've made a career out of giving people the benefit of the doubt, and it's left you emotionally drained. The truth is simple:

- If they wanted to talk to you, they would.
- If they wanted to prioritize you, they would.
- If they cared, you wouldn't have to beg them to show it.

Stop mistaking low effort for emotional complexity. It's not deep, it's just disinterest. And the longer you participate in it, the more your body forgets what it feels like to be respected without having to earn it.

When things feel uncertain, your mind tries to create order: "Maybe they're anxious. Maybe they're just not ready." These stories feel safer than the truth: Maybe they're just not showing up. When your attachment system is triggered, especially if you have anxious or disorganized patterns, your ability to think clearly shuts down. You react. You reach. You overextend. You perform. You abandon yourself in the name of keeping them close.

But letting someone mistreat you isn't passivity. It's choosing to stop arguing with reality. If they disappear, let them. If they ghost and return and ghost again, let them. If they're inconsistent, dismissive, or emotionally unavailable, don't teach them how to love. Let them reveal who they are, and believe it. People don't show you who they are through promises. They show you through patterns.

And love is not managing someone's behavior so you don't feel abandoned. That's not love. That's self-erasure.

As Epictetus said: Some things are within our control. Some are not. You don't find peace by controlling others, you find it by no longer trying to. You don't need to prove your worth. You don't need to convince someone to treat you well. You don't need to keep explaining your basic needs like they're a burden.

Yes, it will hurt. Yes, grief will come. But the grief is not just about them, it's about letting go of the belief that if you just loved better, gave more, were perfect enough, you'd finally receive the love you've always longed for.

So let them. Let them cancel. Let them forget. Let them be inconsistent, detached, cold. And stop rewriting the story to protect your hope.

There's no prize for tolerating disrespect. No virtue in shrinking yourself for people who only reach out when it's easy. You're not "too much." You're just finally unwilling to be less.



You can't heal in chaos. You can't build something real with someone who gives you scraps and calls it intimacy. You don't owe closure to those who took your presence for granted. What you owe is to yourself: a steady mind, a calm body, and the freedom to walk away when something feels wrong, without waiting for proof that it is.

And when they notice you've stopped chasing, stopped checking in, stopped carrying the emotional weight, don't go back. That silence is your answer. That emptiness is your freedom.

That's when you know: you didn't lose them. You found you.

From Sindoor to Marsoos

Muhammad Daniyal Saad

BEN233004



The Pahalgam incident rose tensions between arch rivals as India allegedly blamed Pakistan to be involved in the terrorist attack in the valley.

It was May 07, 2025 when India launched its missiles, targeting several areas in Pakistan that caused 31 deaths in civilians.

This attack was named “Operation Sindoor” and India claimed to target terrorist camps, however, the targets were populated areas according to Pakistan.

Furthermore, India sent drones, breaching International law, an act that cannot be justified even if it is for the sake of vengeance.

Three days latter, on 10th of May, after applying a defensive strategy against Indian aggression, Pakistan used its aerial power and missiles to target major airbases in India

As a result, India lost its S-400 air defense system and 6 jets, including Rafale, and a UAV drone, in the response of Pakistan's “Operation Bunyan-ul-Marsoos”.

However, later that day, USA brokered a ceasefire around 5 pm while pretending to mediate.

This minor skirmish left a huge impact in the region, highlighting Pakistan’s power against big nations on globe.



soft smile
sharp tongue

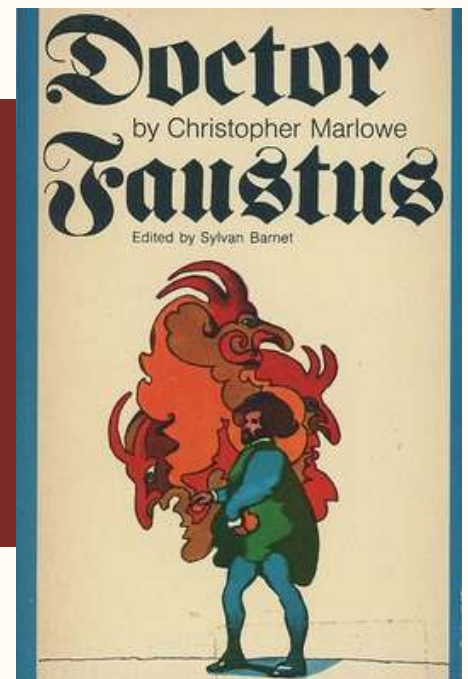
CRITICS' CORNER



BOOK REVIEW: DOCTOR FAUSTUS BY CHRISTOPHER MARLOWE

Malalai Khan

BEN233014



“Fools that will laugh on earth must weep in hell.”

I genuinely laughed reading this. *The Tragical History of the Life and Death of Doctor Faustus*, commonly known as *Doctor Faustus*, is an Elizabethan tragedy by Christopher Marlowe, inspired by German folktales about a scholar who makes a pact with the devil, trading his soul for magical powers. This is my first Marlowe play and certainly a delight. I love religious imagery and I am mortified at myself that I didn't read this sooner. Plus, it's like one of the first ever dark academia books out there.

“If we say that we have no sin, / We deceive ourselves, and there's no truth in us. / Why then belike we must sin, / And so consequently die. / Ay, we must die an everlasting death.”

Anyway, upon my own interpretation, Faustus seemed to “fall prey” (given the fate vs. free will context of the play) to another deadly sin which was not demonstrated by Lucifer—despair. It's the eighth one that trails back to the fourth-century monk Evagrius Ponticus's list of cardinal sins which was further translated into the Latin of Christianity in many writings of John Cassian, thus becoming part of the Western tradition's Catholic devotions before being revised again to seven by Pope Gregory I.

My point is that Marlowe, knowing that he was very well-read, kept that as the true factor in Faustus's fall because he gives in to despair multiple times throughout the drama in his dilemma, and that leads to him being apathetic towards the afterlife of his soul and thus being “vulnerable” to the devil's plan. Despite the darker subtexts of faith and sin, Marlowe also has his way with comedic elements.

All in all, whether you are a 16th-century Christian or not, this play clearly outlines the necessity to know the boundaries of good and evil as well as unbridled ambition while criticising the overly-aggrandised organized religion during Europe's Renaissance by portraying the hypocrisy of the papacy.

“He that loves pleasure must for pleasure fall.”

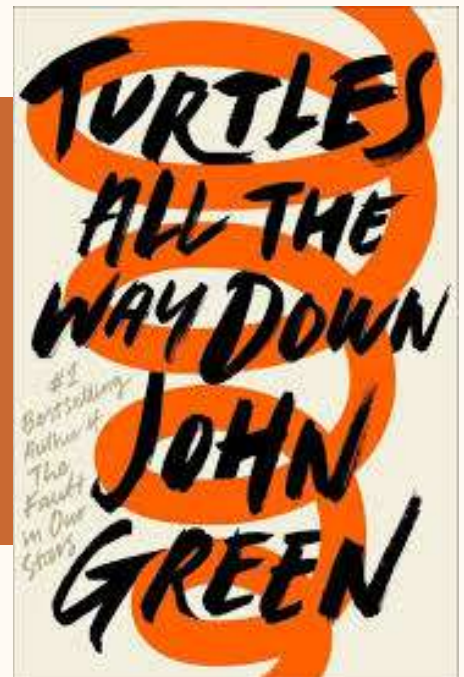
I wrote this review on the night of my Classical and Renaissance Drama final exam. Would have summoned Marlowe's spirit if I could, haha.

“What art thou Faustus, but a man condemned to die?”

BOOK REVIEW: TURTLES ALL THE WAY DOWN BY JOHN GREEN

Khushnuma Shabir

BEN221034



“No one ever says good-bye unless they want to see you again.”

This line was the last whisper of the book, and it stayed with me long after I closed it. It made me pause and think about all those people who say goodbye softly, slowly, with care maybe because somewhere, deep down, they’re hoping for another hello.

This was my very first John Green novel, and it felt like the kind of book that doesn’t just speak to you it quietly sits beside you, holds your hand, and listens too. It’s a simple story on the surface, gently told, nothing too complex but inside those pages is a world of emotion. It’s fiction that feels more real than reality. You’ll find pieces of your own mind tucked between the lines, your worries mirrored, your fears held tenderly in the folds of Aza’s journey.

There are no loud plot twists or dramatic turns. What this book gives instead is something rarer: the feeling of being understood. It shows how heavy thoughts can feel when they spiral out of your control. It speaks to the quiet struggles we don’t always have the words for. And it reminds us that sometimes, the loudest battles happen silently, in our own minds.

One of the most honest things this book taught me is that not all questions get answers. Sometimes, the truth hurts more than the not knowing. Sometimes, we choose not to dig too deep, because we know what we might find and we’re just not ready. That’s okay too. Healing isn’t a race. Some questions can remain questions, and that doesn’t make you weak. It makes you human.

The beauty of *Turtles All the Way Down* is that it allows you to sit with your thoughts, without rushing to fix them. It teaches you to live alongside your fears, not fight them. It says, ***You’re allowed to be a little broken. You’re still lovable, still whole, still worthy.***

And maybe, just maybe, that’s what we all need to hear sometimes.

You might have to pause while reading this. You might need to put the book down, close your eyes, and take a breath. But when you return to it, it welcomes you back like a friend who never stopped waiting.

“I was beginning to learn that your life is a story told about you, not one that you tell.”

POETRY BAR



YOU'RE LIKE PISTACHIO

Kashaf Yousaf

BPH243073

You're like pistachio among all the dry fruits,
Or, like oranges among all the fruits,
Or, like purple among all the colours,
Or, like winters among all the seasons,
Or like eyes among all the body parts.

Or, like the moon amongst the stars
Or, like a cat amongst the pets
Or, like poetry amongst the arts
Or, like home amongst the houses
Or, like a dream amongst the reality

Or anatomy among all the subjects
Or, ferrero rocher among all the chocolates
Or, roses among all the flowers
Or, a ray among all the darkness.

Or, comfort food amongst cuisines
Or, dusk amongst the dawn
Or, a hoodie amongst the wardrobe
Or, a fragrance amongst the senses
Or, a recurring thought amongst fleeting feelings
Or, a song amongst the noise
Or, a pen amongst the instruments
Or, a sunflower amongst the garden
Or, an angel amongst the sinners
Or, the rainbow amongst the clouds.

You're there in everything I see,
in the background, silently.
You're never unseen
and always missed by me.



CHILDREN OF GAZA

Zainab Noor

BSP243021

Oh, Children of Gaza

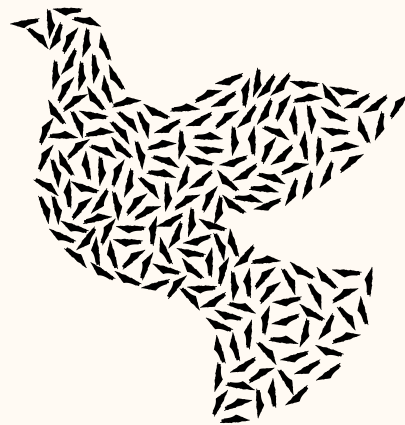
Every day is the same.
Every day, I see your tears fall.
Every day, I see blood on you.
Every day, I see you die.

Oh, Children of Gaza, how can I help you?
I write this
To let the world know of you.
To let the world hear your silent cries.
To let the world see the blood they choose to ignore.
To remind them of the mother you lost,
The father you lost,
The home that once held your laughter.

But most of all, I write
To honor your bravery.
To show that you are not just wounds and tears.
You are strength.
You are faith.
You are the courage the world refuses to see.

Oh, Children of Gaza,
I wish I could wipe the tears that fell
As your hand slipped from your mother's grasp.
I wish I could wash away the blood
That stained the earth when the world turned a blind eye.

But I cannot reach you—
So I write these broken words,
These imperfect words,
To tell you how perfect you are.



WOULD YOU FORGIVE ME

Amna Farooq

BEN213028

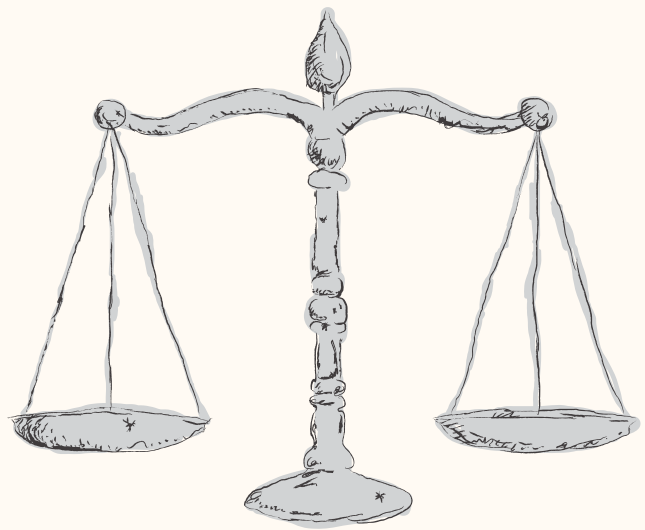
Looking at your picture
Everything feels so surreal
All the time we spent together
All the moments we lived together
Worst or bad
Happy or joyful
Were all of those real?
Were all of them dream?

My heart throbs
My heart aches
Remembering your face
If only I could tell you
How much I miss you

I often think about you
I often wonder about you
Can you see us ? Falling
Can you feel us? Tearing

Do you feel our pain?
Do you feel our grief?
Do you feel our joy?
Do you feel our glee?

I often ask my lord
When we finally meet each other
On the day of resurrection
When we finally face each other
On the day of judgment
Would you forgive me?
Would you forgive me?



EID UL FITAR

Jahanzeb Akhtar

BEN221024

Eid's enchantment, hidden but not lost
Childhood's wonder, still alive at any cost

Now, in youthful silence, I search for the
spark
A magic that once ignited, a love that left its
mark

Empty roads, a canvas of solitude's hue
A silence so profound, it whispers anew

The stillness of night, a chance to restart
A solitude that reminds me, childhood is
always in heart

In this quietude, I hear the past
A whispered reminder of love that forever
lasts

The memories of laughter, the tears, the glee
Echoes of a childhood, wild and carefree

And now, in this silence, I find my way
A sense of solitude, a peaceful sway



LIFE

Muhammad Taha

BSE233186

Walking journey all my own
Thinking I could find a friend
Life goes by you never know
Like spark of fire instant shows
Life has shown me many folds
Bright or Blue like ocean floors
Reflecting skies or hiding more

Good times were the family talks
When jokes were the only shots
Laughter made those moments glow
Remembering now the pleasure flows
But life is colored with many tones
And joy is the only song

Many splinters and many thorns
Black and white like broken doors
Falling hard might break my bones
But hope of light shows me more

Rain of spikes might open wounds
But I have a heart made of gold
When life is heavy on my soul
Good memories are the only cure
Life is a mysterious place
Where I will rise or I will fall
Many stars have lived their lives
But mine is one that no one knows



CARTOGRAPHY OF THE SCARS

Noor Fatima

BBC231001

Sitting in a room, listening to the news,
Suddenly, a flashback transports me to my youth.
I'm back in childhood, standing in the middle of the room,
Everything is dark, the room feels like a prison's gloom.

My heart is pounding with fear and pain,
I'm crying and shouting, asking for help in vain.
"Hey, is there anyone here? Please let me out!"
But the voice echoes back, a haunting, mournful shout.

A door creaks, maybe the shadow of curse and fear
Is back from my childhood, drawing ever near.
The voices and evil laughter outside the room,
Are going to kill me, the shadow is approaching soon.

The innocence that was precious is lost,
I'm asking God, "why me?" But the answer's frost.
I didn't get a response' and now I've awoken,
From the nightmare' still asking, still unspoken.

Maybe in another life, I'll find the answer I seek,
And the wounds of my childhood will finally start to speak.
Until then, I'll hold on to hope's fragile thread,
And pray that someday, my heart will be free from the dread.



SPIRAL

Malalai Khan

BEN233014

i dream of tunnels that have no way out
and stray dogs lying gutted across the street.
i want to pry all the buttons
off from the keyboard like teeth
and stab the ballpoint pen
right through the journal's spine—
the blank daily pages have more to say
than the scrawled ones.

i play the same mixtape of ghost words on repeat
until they twist around my throat
like floss—violet, vermillion, a vertigo hits
and i fall down a winding staircase—
past everything i ever tried to be—in a static waltz
but there's a figure at the end that i don't want to face
and so i shut my eyes.

my reflection flickers in windows
but not in the mirror.
my shadow steps away
when i draw nearer.

to be free from all sorts of masks and names,
to drift unseen like a phantom,
to be untethered from invisible threads,
to be simply laid *bare*.
how do you cut off something that isn't even there?
i grasp at nothing and open my hands—
how empty they are as everything trickles through.
how solid the floor feels.
how the lungs forget to breathe.
how bold of me to believe.

how tempting it is to be in a room full of sharp objects.



FEARLESS

Iqra Mohaiudeen

BEN221025

The blowy wind,
The greeny trees,
The flowy road and a little music which I need.
Different stops, on the same road,
This journey is long, couldn't be hold.
This cloudy sky tells something,
Might be the rain is about to come with the wind.
After every hot day, comes the ease,
With a soft and cool breeze.
Don't get worry in hotter and harder days,
There is a rain to come and wind to stay,
And may the good days are waiting to come in your ways.



WORDS

Aamna Maroof

BPH233005

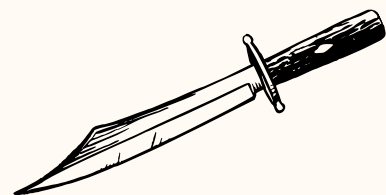
Words that cut Sharper than a knife
Opens the wounds buried deep inside
They snatch away your identity a while
And then they make regrets alive

The stabbing pain feels unbearable
The heart breaks it kills someone
You fall and fall in agony, alas!
No signs left of who you are

Then you unleash the demons inside
In anger, sorrows, cry or quiet
You feel something creepy in thrive
That's your hunger for revenge I fright

He who's quiet wins this scene.
He knows and acts and he concedes
He's the one who wins this fight
His fight was with the Satan inside

He restrained his anger alright!
This leads him back to life



HOME, SWEET HOME

Hafsa Rafique

BBT243021

Once, there was a home—
A real home
Where all my happiness began and ended...

Where my mummy and daddy lived with the
little me!
My whole world revolved around them.

When I woke up, I found them there with me.
Daddy used to play with me.
We watched TV together,
While Mummy cooked meals for us.
We used to laugh, play, eat, and sleep together.
My parents were my Heaven.

There was happiness and love
All around me!

When I got tired, my mummy
Put me in her arms.
My daddy kissed me on the forehead,
And magically, all my tiredness disappeared.

It felt like that kiss and warmth
Took away all my worries.

The home where I was born, grew up,
And lived with my world full of
Love and cherished memories...

I used to call it
"My Home, Sweet Home."

But... one day,
My sweet home disappeared.
My whole world collapsed!

Now,
My sweet home is no more...

Only memories echo in empty rooms.
I carry their warmth inside my heart,
But the silence — it speaks louder than words.



HER WISH, MY PROMISE

Meral Imtiaz

ACS221004

If she asks for the moon's gentle beam,
I'll fetch it down, a lover's dream.
But if she insists with a playful grin,
I'll show her mirror, her beauty within.



FIGURING OUT MODE

Shakeel Khan

BEN213020

They keep suggesting stuff,
Stuff like getting a job,
Starting a business, something of my own,
Rather just get another degree,
Or get married,
Well, for your information, I have been trying some things,
Things like getting a job,
Starting a business, something of my own,
Thinking of getting another degree or getting married,
But none of it turns out to be
What I would say is my 'passion',
I wanna be different,
And blend in,
A circle with nooks to explore,
I am sorry, I am still on 'figuring out mode'.
And I am sure I am not alone.



THE ALCHEMY OF FOUR YEARS

Laiba Ali

BEN213047

I stepped inside with quiet grace,
A stranger in this crowded place.
A soul uncertain, eyes still wide,
With dreams and doubts I couldn't hide.

"What shall I gain? Whom will I be?"
A question whispered endlessly.
Four fleeting years, an unwritten page—
A tale unfolding stage by stage.

That echoing class, once cold and vast,
Now holds my future and my past.
Where nameless faces, row by row,
Would bloom into the hearts I know.

I trembled first to raise my voice,
Afraid to fail, to make a choice.
But time, the gentlest alchemist,
Transformed my fear to strength, to bliss.

Our mentors—stern yet full of grace—
Lit fires we could not replace.
They guided gently, taught us more,
Than books and grades and classroom lore.

That first attempt—a faltering sound,
A voice unsure, eyes to the ground.
But slowly, like the breaking dawn,
The fear dissolved, and strength was drawn.

Yet dearest still, amidst this rise,
Were friends—my stars beneath these skies.
Not merely names or passing days,
But chapters inked in golden phrase.

They held me close when spirits sank,
They filled the void, they closed each blank.
In laughter shared and silence deep,
They gave me memories I'll keep.

We whispered truths through hallway air,
Shared midnight snacks and thoughts laid bare.
From foolish jokes to serious talk,
They walked with me this winding walk.

In stolen glances, quiz-day schemes,
In shattered hopes and sunlit dreams,
In study nights and careless play—
They were the light that lit my way.

We learned, we stumbled, we stood tall,
Together we embraced it all.
With different minds, yet hearts as one,
A bond that can't be come undone.

But now this tale must reach its close—
And oh, how swift the story goes.
The clock has turned, the page must end,
Yet still I grieve to lose a friend.

We were the first—the seed, the flame,
The soul that gave this place its name.
We carved a path, we left a mark,
A spark that lit the long, dark arc.

And though this chapter says goodbye,
Its echo lives, it cannot die.
You were my growth, my truth, my grace—
No time nor distance can erase.

The experiment ends, but not the heart,
The soul we built will not depart.
And if you ask who I became—
Know that I carry you in name.

So here's to us, to what we've been,
To every loss and every win.
This tale we wrote, with love and tears,
Shall echo through the coming years.

THE LIGHT WITHIN

Khushnuma Shabir

BEN221034

I am the sun that paints the sky,
A glow that never fades, but sighs.
Not just in looks, but in my heart,
A beauty born from every part.

Like rivers deep, my kindness flows,
A quiet stream where comfort grows.
With compassion, I am like the rain,
Softly falling, easing pain.

My soul's a garden, wild and pure,
Where love blooms bright, forever sure.
I see the world through open eyes,
Like morning mist beneath the skies.

I am the hand that lifts you high,
Like wings that carry you to the sky.
My smile, a light that pierces gray,
A beacon to brighten your day.

I walk this world with open arms,
Like fields that stretch with endless charms.
With every step, I share my grace,
And bring a smile to every face.

I am a friend, as strong as oak,
Whose roots are deep, whose branches poke.
Through every storm, through every sky,
Reaching out, I lift you high.

In every act, I leave a trace,
Like footprints on the sands of grace.
I shine and share, I help and care,
A soul that's always there to bear.



TAWAKUL 2.0

Aneeqa Ali
BEN213008

It might take a year,
maybe it's just here,
If He willed for it,
You'll see your path lit..

The wait gets hard,
Maybe tears us apart,
You must have hope,
True believers have to cope.

Like threads entangled,
Your mind might strangle,
These signs and ciphers,
Require to decipher.

Evils we wish for, must be abhorred,
Short-lived happiness, we always run for
are traps adored, merely to allure
Until you realize, these cures were impure.

These contrary whispers might blur the sign
of a plan divine, that you may undermine,

Its a pearl concealed, covered in a seal,
shelled and veiled, its something surreal,
It'll soon show its grace, shining to heal.
A blessing of "noor", with it, happy you'll feel.

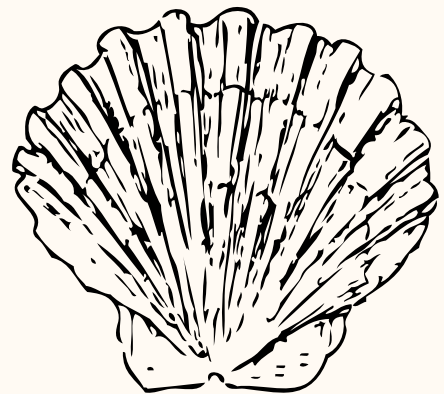
Our aims will shatter,
Our souls have to scatter,
So we find the light: a key to all matters,
Confined within, a supreme treasure gathers.

It took me long, until i found a clue,
To take a step, not many but few,
It's a test to see if you are true
— thus, it'll sticken your chest,

So you try the your best
And leave the rest—
is the answer to this simple quest.

Responding to His call,
Will Never make us fall,
We'll find treasures without any measure,
That'll fill our hearts with overflowing pleasure.

So never lose hope,
Tightly hold the rope,
As your head bows down,
You'll get a crown.

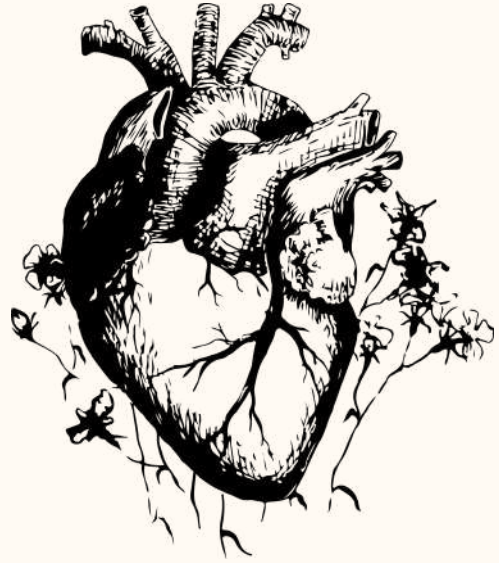


WHISPERS

Aiza Lodhi

BBS213002

I love him
And my heart knows it
Whatever they say
I will love him anyways
He's weak but God knows
He makes me strong
I love him
He is not capable? But God knows
He made me loveable
They say he's replaceable, but God knows
Only if my heart can be replaced
I love him
And my love will not sway my dear
Just hear what I say
Hear the whispers
Whispers of my heart
Calling your name
Saying I love you
To you



FREEDOM

Shiza Asfar

BEN221026

In deep fold of the night,
My broken wings dip,
Ignited by a fire,
From their bloody feathers to their tip,
As these folds of night,
Surrender to the day's golden light,
I rise slowly, painfully,
To wear my black cloak of fake might,
“Why you chose me as your partner, oh loneliness?” I ask
“All things divine are lonely are they not?” He replies.



THAT WAS AN AGE, AND THIS IS ONE

Aansa Qamreen

BEN213036

Pain and joy were one for all—
Be they our own or be they foreign.
That was an age, and this is one—
How time has flown, how much has gone.

When Grandfather lived, our home was clay,
No fear of thieves or robbers' way.
We ate dry bread, slept deep at night,
The evenings full, the noons were bright.
Hearts were calm, no frown or crease,
Simple souls, yet full of peace.
They were naïve but kind and true,
With love in all they'd say and do.

But oh how swiftly they did part,
From worldly ties and beating hearts.
Pain and joy were one for all—
Be they our own or be they foreign.
That was an age, and this is one—
How time has flown, how much has gone.

Then came Father's time, and so
Into the home, did learning flow.
But knowledge brought along its pain,
Its silent stress, its mental strain.
Traditions old began to fade,
And in their place, new paths were laid.
The mud house gone, cement stood tall,
With walls around the courtyard small.

A job in office, fixed in role,
A monthly pay to meet the goal.
The boss was just, the trust was clear,
Life went on with little fear.
Though money short, there was no grief,
Our poor man's home was full relief.
That was an age, and this is one—
How time has flown, how much has gone.



Now comes my time—it's truly strange,
No one's truly close in range.
Each person walks this world alone,
Each face a mask, a stranger shown.
No tear, no smile that truly stays,
Life lost in cluttered, empty ways.
We've lost ourselves in golden thread,
The net of wealth around us spread.

We've got the cash, respect, and fame,
Servants call out to our name.
A house, a car, a plot of land—
But peace slips out of every hand.
And in the quest to reach this place,
We've sacrificed both time and grace.
Pain and joy were one for all—
Be they our own or be they foreign.
That was an age, and this is one—
How time has flown, how much has gone.

O children born in days to come,
O souls whose journey's just begun—
Forget not what we had to bear,
The weight of loss, the silent care.
May pain that walked with us each day
Not cross your paths or block your way.
May grief we swallowed deep inside
Not touch your hearts or turn your tide.

We lived like strangers in a crowd,
No voice could rise, no thought was loud.
May such a life not find your door,
May light and joy be what you store.
Wherever you walk, let it be bright,
Let 21st century bring you light.
While we were thirsty for some peace,
May peace in your days never cease.

May joy be rooted in your soul,
And life, a dream that's kind and whole.
Pain and joy were one for all—
Be they our own or be they foreign.
That was an age, and this is one—
How time has flown, how much has gone.



CHILDHOOD NOSTALGIA

Muhammad Daniyal Saad

BEN233004

The echoes of my mom's
melodious poem
call to me,
that she used to sing
in the morning
that pulled me
from sleep into the day.

Wearing a tidy uniform,
bolting towards the school,
breathing cool
scent of morning dew
while holding her hand,
life seemed to be a painless track.

Nostalgia of the lunch time
lingers in my thoughts
as I always had a mouthwatering meal
with me.

Melting into mom's embrace
after dismissal,
always gave me a sense of a shelter.
However, these chores
are now printed
on recollection notebook.



THE DRAMATIC PHOENIX

Tehreem Khawaja

BEN221041

My name is Tehreem — sleepless, strange,
Five hours deep in an anxious exchange.
A brain half-glitched, but still I fight,
Through deadlines forged in endless night.

Midterms pass — a silent toll,
Then quizzes strike and projects roll.
Each task, a war I didn't choose,
Yet I show up, win, or bruise.

The world conspires — I sense its plot,
A stage where every thread is taut.
Morals? Iron. I do not bend.
I'm loyal to the bitter end.

Eclectic heart, a woven maze,
A thousand paths, a thousand plays.
Introvert with trembling grace,
Yet still I meet the world's embrace.

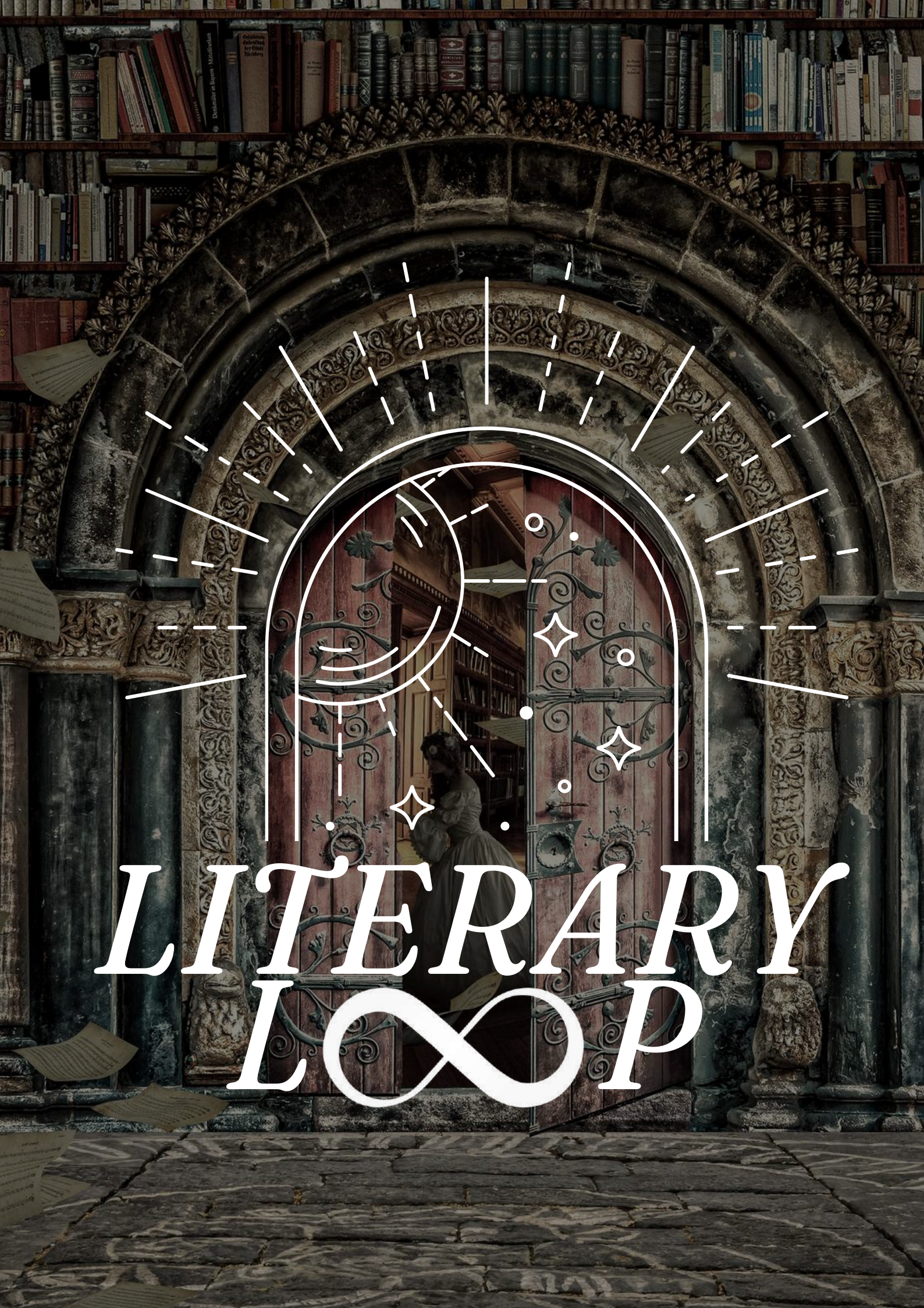
I fall apart — I always do,
In blankets, sobbing, lost from view.
Then rise again, my tea in hand,
Reborn, resilient — I understand.

The kitchen calls — my sacred ground,
Where joy in sugar's swirl is found.
Spices hum and laughter blooms,
A cure for all the world's dark dooms.

From "hope is lost" to boundless might,
Each cake a torch, each dish a fight.
The world shall know me, storm and flame —
A girl, a fire, a whispered name.



(AI-generated)



LITERARY LOOP

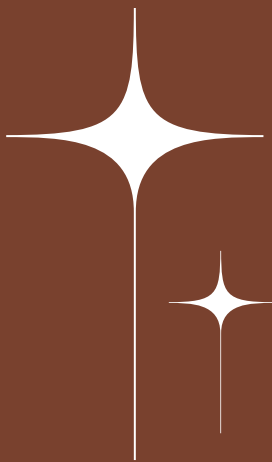


THE RENAISSANCE

WHY IT STILL MATTERS



Malalai Khan
BEN233014



When the Renaissance bloomed across Europe in the 14th century, it transformed how humans viewed their creative potential. Beginning in Florence and radiating outward, this cultural rebirth wasn't just about producing magnificent art—it represented a fundamental shift in how people engaged with ideas and knowledge. Today, amid the rise of artificial intelligence, we're witnessing a parallel renaissance in personal creativity that draws surprising connections to those earlier innovations.

Renaissance thinkers revolutionized knowledge-sharing through techniques we're now rediscovering. Chief among these was "commonplacing"—the practice of collecting quotes, observations, and ideas in personal notebooks. Figures like Leonardo da Vinci filled thousands of pages with sketches, calculations, and insights, creating a personal intellectual ecosystem. Today, digital commonplacing has surged in popularity as writers and thinkers seek to reclaim human curation in an algorithm-dominated landscape. Apps like Notion, Roam Research, and Obsidian have modernized this Renaissance practice, allowing people to connect ideas across disciplines just as Leonardo connected anatomy to engineering to art.

The Renaissance printing press democratized knowledge in ways that parallel today's digital publishing revolution. Just as Gutenberg's innovation bypassed traditional gatekeepers, platforms like Substack have enabled writers to build direct relationships with readers. The explosive growth of Substack newsletters—from fewer than 50,000 in 2019 to millions today—represents writers reclaiming creative autonomy in the face of both institutional consolidation and AI-generated content. These modern essayists, like their Renaissance counterparts, often work across disciplines, blending personal observation with research, philosophy with practical guidance.

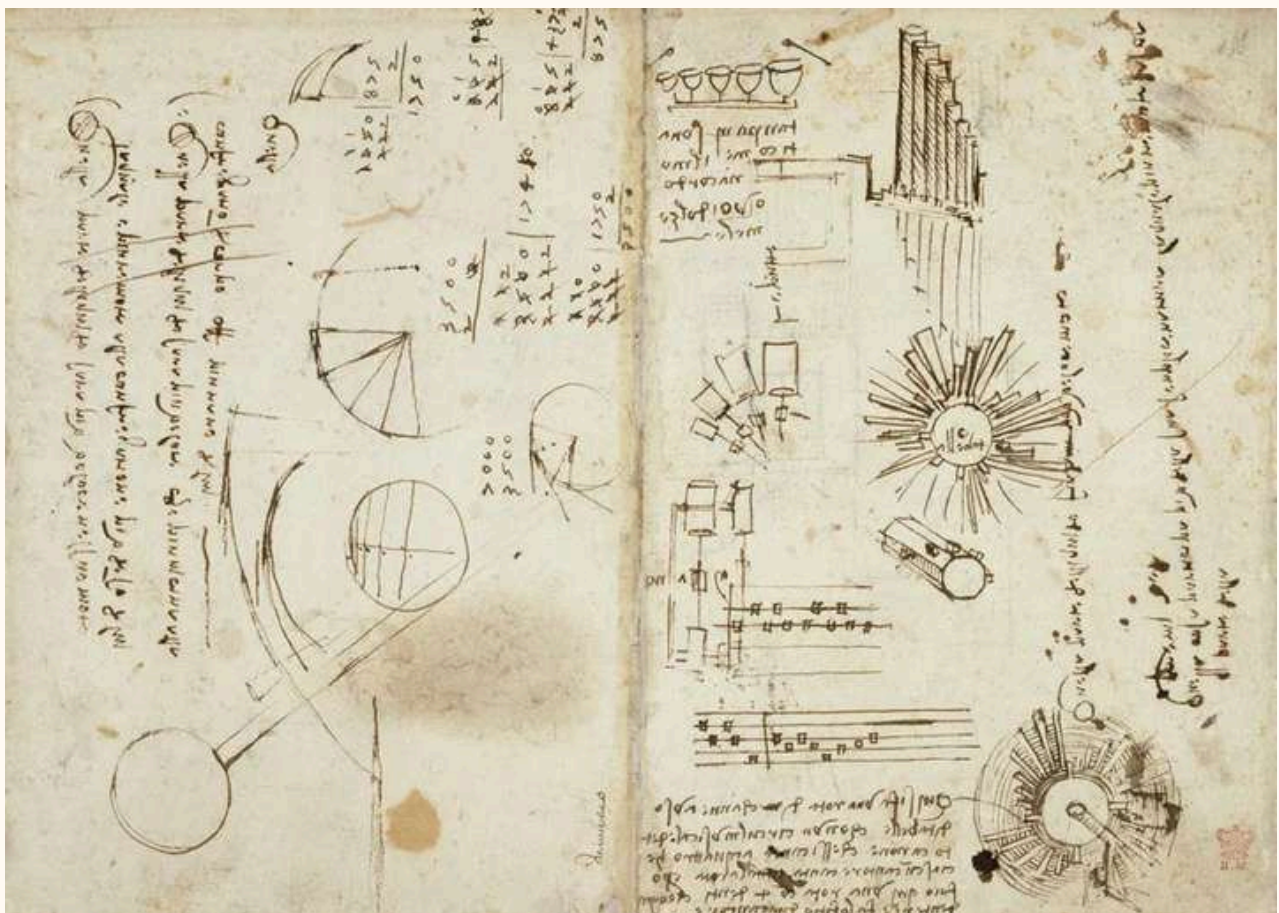
Renaissance humanists prized distinctive personal voice and perspective—qualities that have taken on renewed importance in the AI era. As large language models can generate seemingly competent but often soulless content, the unique perspective of individual writers has become more valuable, not less. The most successful Substack writers don't compete with AI by producing more content faster; instead, they offer something AI cannot: authentic lived experience and idiosyncratic insight. This mirrors how Renaissance artists like Michelangelo distinguished themselves through distinctive style and personal vision rather than mere technical proficiency.

The Renaissance concept of the "studio" as both workshop and intellectual space has found new expression in digital communities built around independent creators. Discord servers, private Slack channels, and subscriber communities on platforms like Geneva have become virtual versions of Renaissance workshops where apprenticeship, collaboration, and debate flourish. These spaces preserve human connection and creative exchange even as AI tools become more prevalent in creative workflows.

Perhaps most significantly, both the historic Renaissance and today's creative resurgence emerged during periods of technological upheaval. Just as Renaissance thinkers neither rejected classic texts nor remained bound by them, today's most innovative creators neither dismiss AI tools nor surrender to them. Instead, they integrate these tools into deeply human creative processes—using AI for research, editing, or ideation while preserving human judgment, taste, and purpose.

This neo-Renaissance approach to creativity—combining digital commonplacing, independent publishing, distinctive voice, collaborative communities, and selective use of new technologies—offers a compelling vision for human creativity in the age of AI. It suggests that our creative future lies not in competing with machines at machine-like tasks but in rediscovering and enhancing what makes our thinking uniquely human: the ability to connect disparate ideas, draw on lived experience, and create meaning rather than merely information.

Like the original Renaissance, today's creative resurgence reminds us that periods of technological disruption often catalyze new forms of human expression rather than extinguishing them. When we face seemingly existential challenges to human creativity, we might do well to remember how Renaissance thinkers looked backward to ancient wisdom while simultaneously creating unprecedented futures.



Leonardo da Vinci's notebooks are a great example of a commonplace book

THROUGH THE LENS



Santa Monica Pier, USA

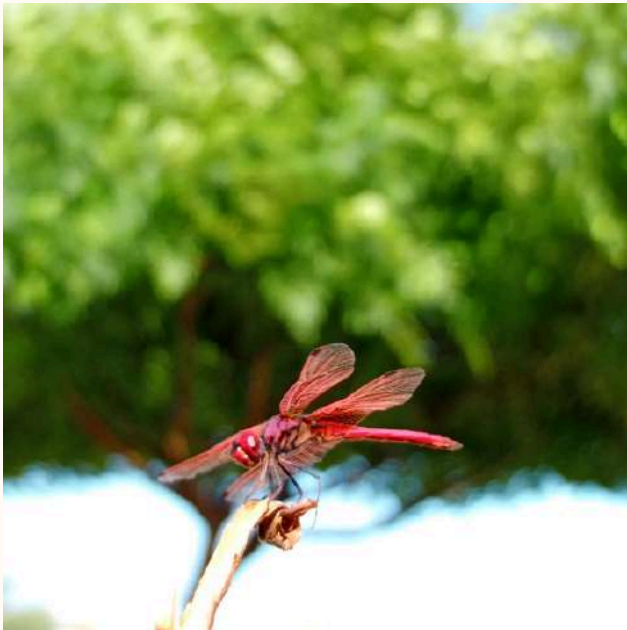
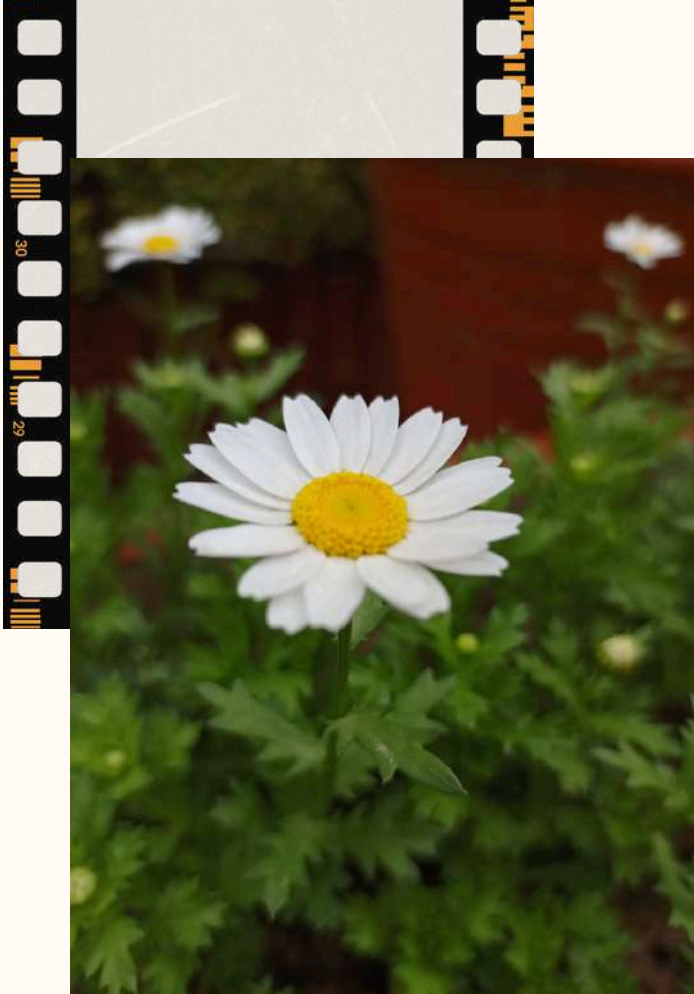
Sun, Sep 22nd 2019

Chaudhary Ehsan Rasheed
BCS223075



Somewhere in Galliyat

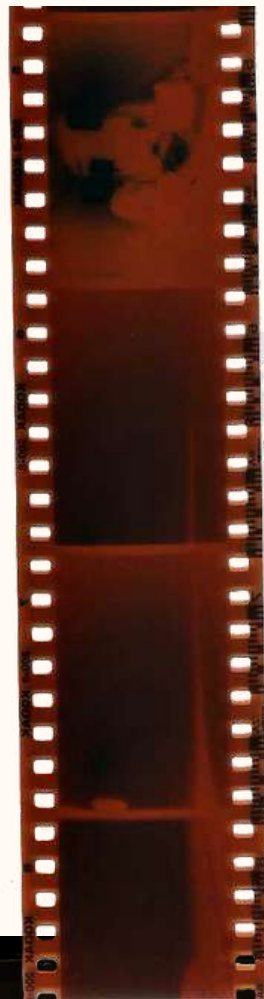
Rida Touseef
BBT241018



Spring in Full Bloom



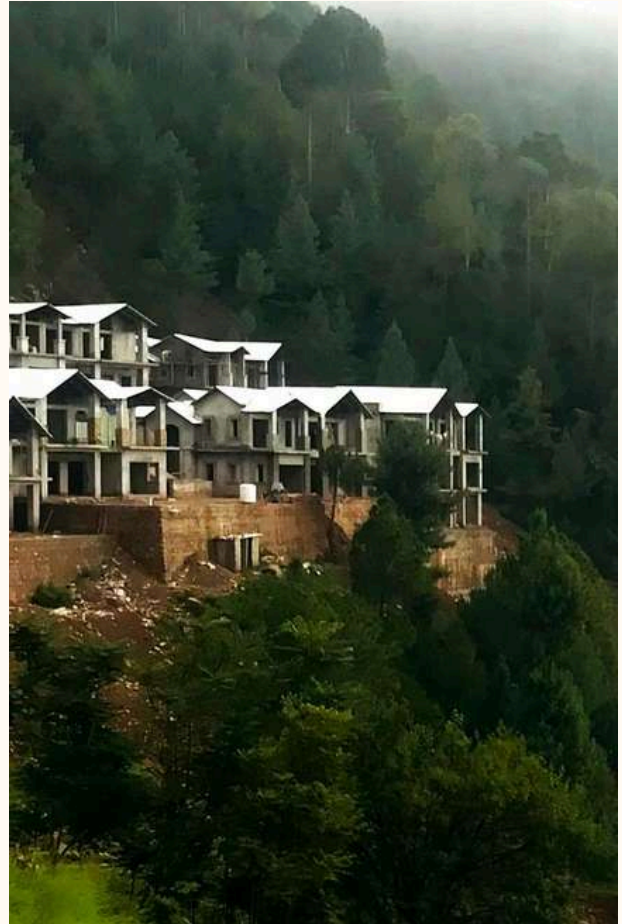
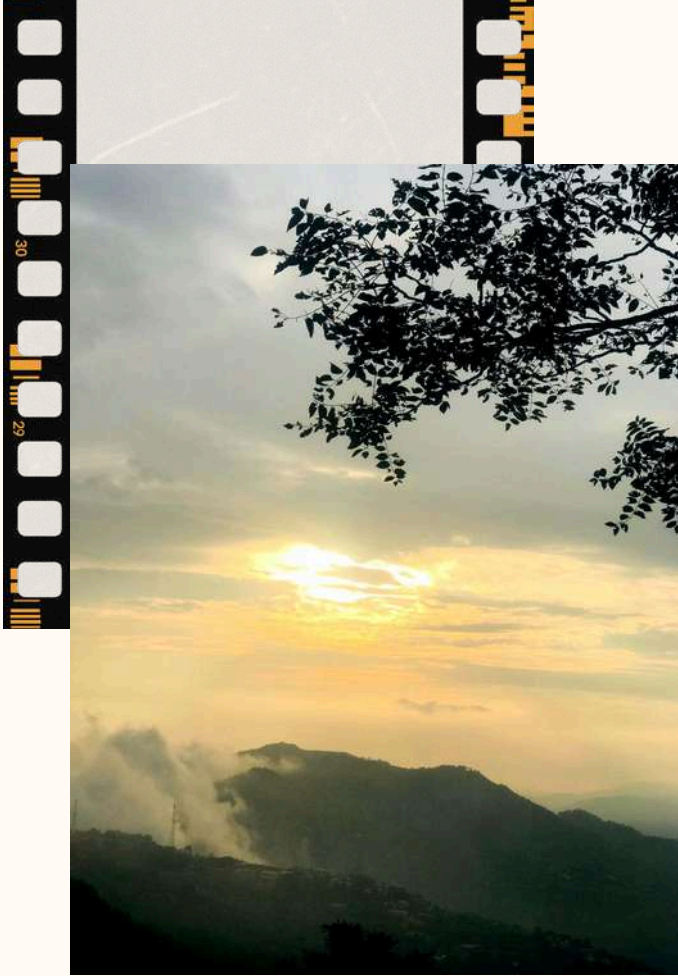
Zainab Fatima
BPH223032



Moments Lost in Time

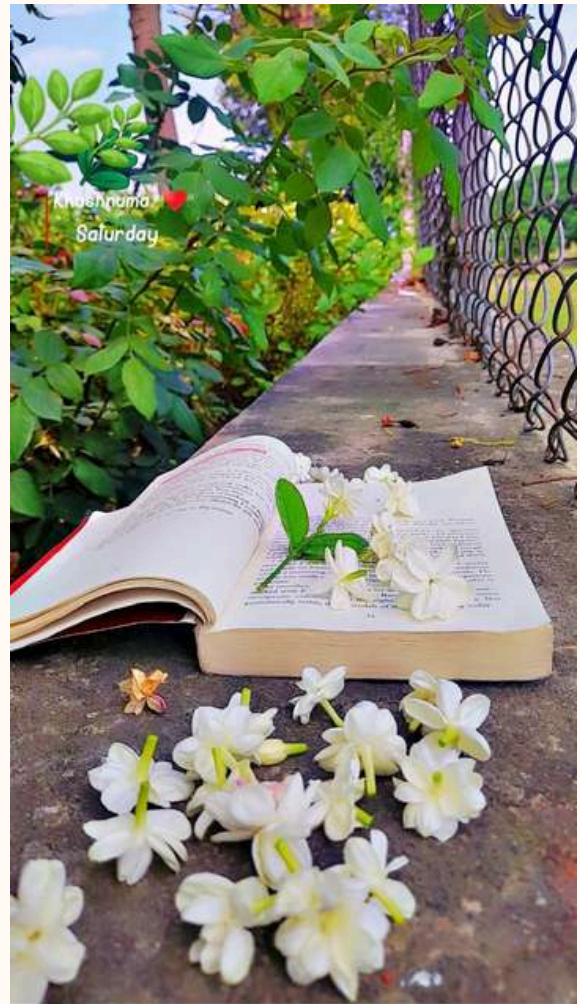


Areeba Rasool
BEN233006



Chasing Sunsets and Dreams

Khushnuma Shabir
BEN221034

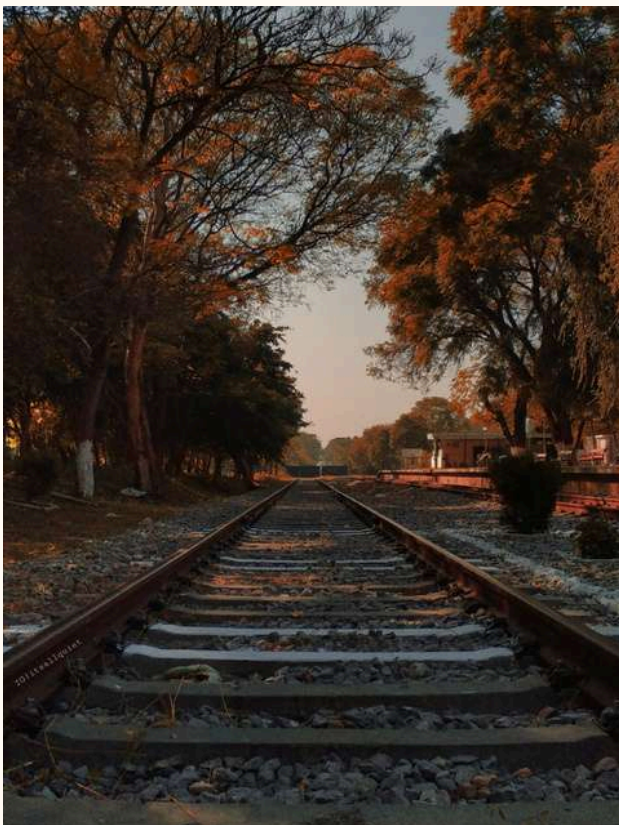


Nature's Canvas, a Masterpiece

Laiba Khanum
MSP251030



Wandering with the Wild Things



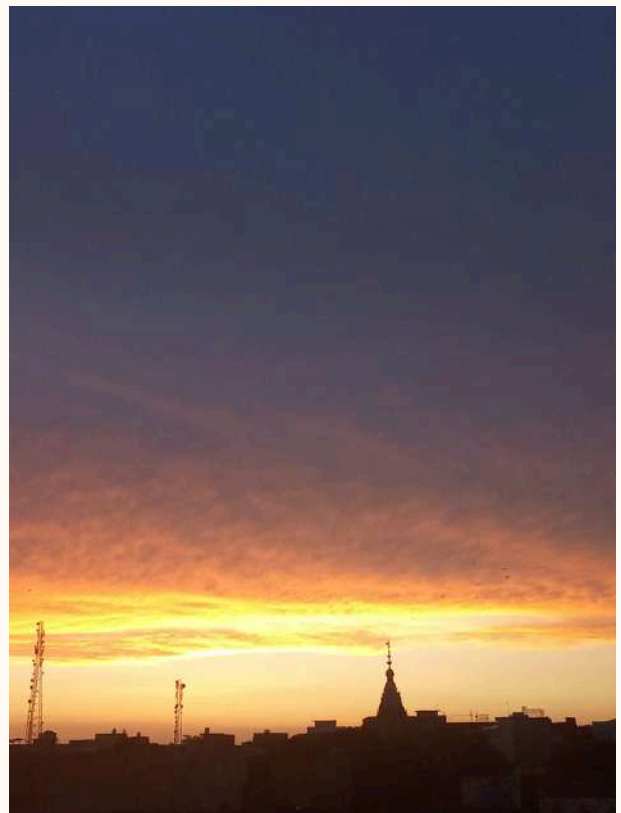
Mehak Fahim
BEN241004



*Lost in the Vastness,
Found in the Beauty*



Rafia Basit
BEN241001

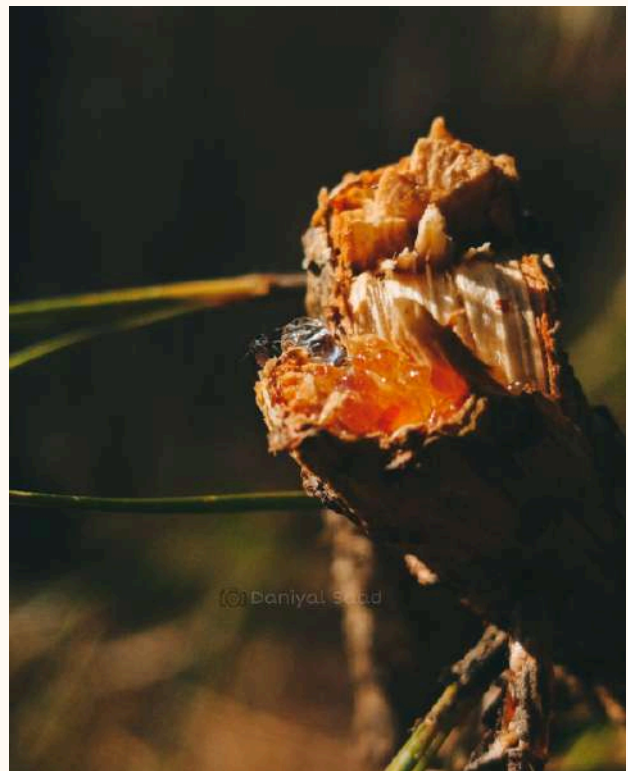


*Sky Above, Earth
Below, Peace Within*

Muhammad Daniyal Saad
BEN233004



*Bloom Where
You are Planted*





CANVAS CHAOS

*a collage of
young picassos*



Zainab Fatima

BPH223032

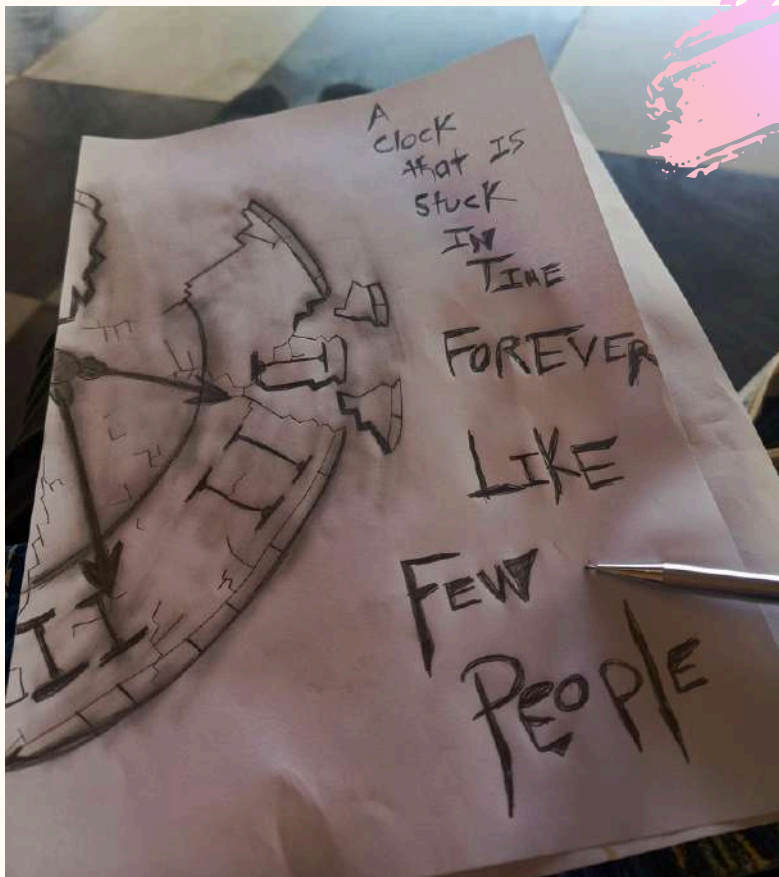


Capturing the Essence of a Soul



توڑ دے ظلم کے پانچوں کو کہ یارب ہم سے
ایں کشمیر کے آنسو نہیں دیکھے جاتے

Lareb Manzoor
BCY241015

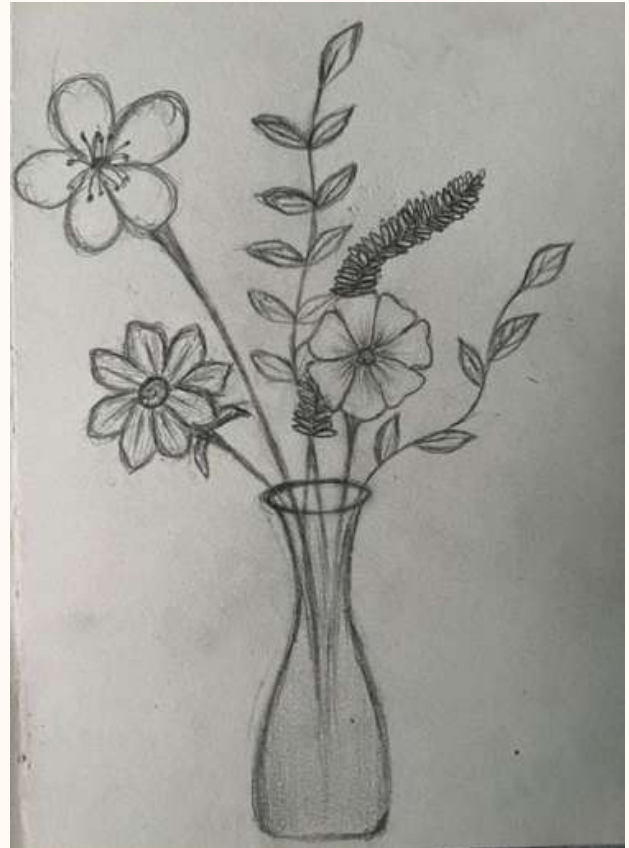


*To Be or Not To Be,
That is the Question*



Khushnuma Shabir

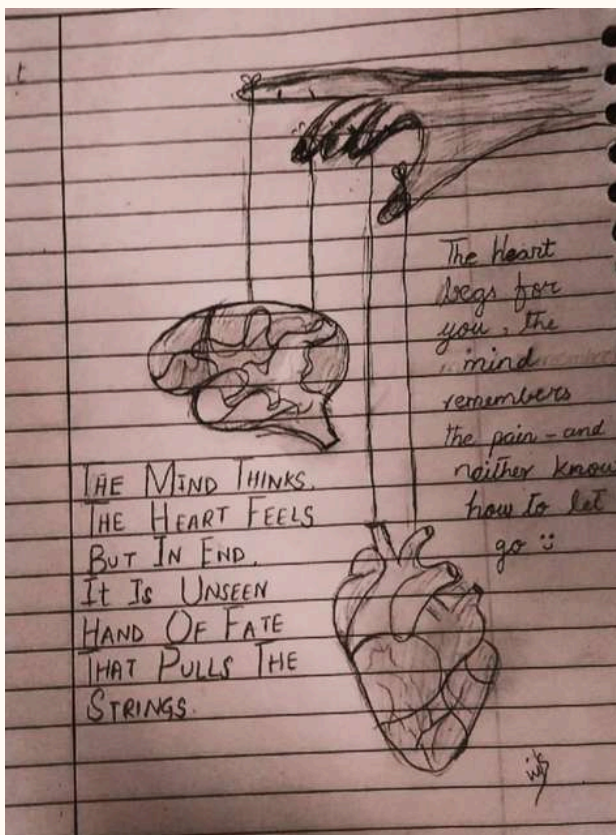
BEN221034



Lines That Tell a Story

Maha Malik

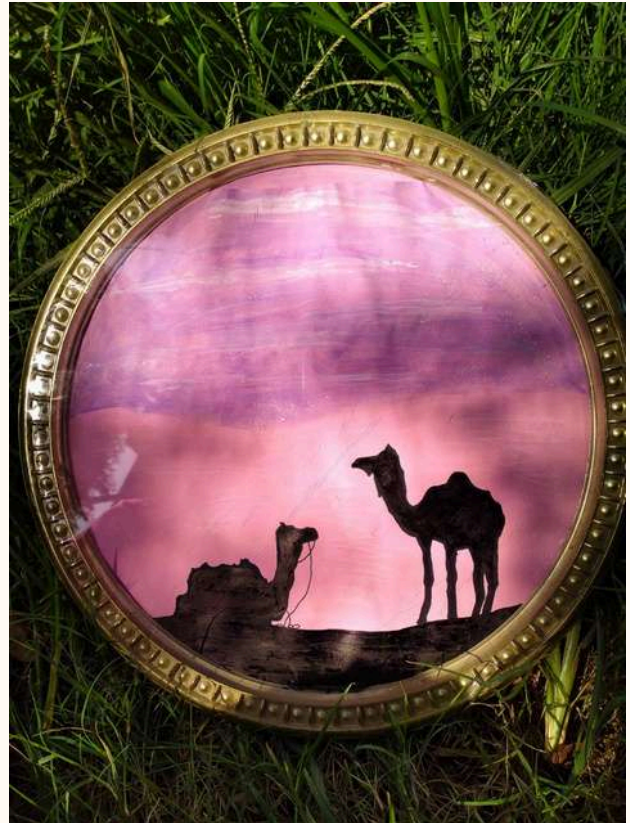
BCY241016



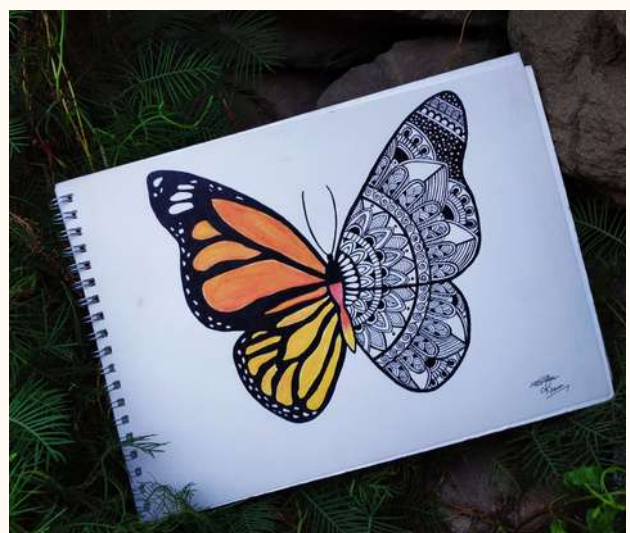


Laiba Khanum

MSP251030



Nature in Fragments



Muhammad Daniyal Saad
BEN233004



The Mountains are Calling to Me



Credits

Special acknowledgments to Pinterest, Unsplash, and Canva for their extensive collection of royalty-free images and tools that were used in the creation of SPELL Magazine.

Thank you to everyone who submitted their work!

Cover designing by Malalai Noor Khan and Areeba Rasool.

All rights reserved.

© 2025 SPELL



STUDENTS' PANEL OF ENGLISH LITERATURE AND LINGUISTICS



THIS MAGAZINE IS A PROJECT OF
THE DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH AT
CAPITAL UNIVERSITY OF
SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY