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School of Liberal Arts

Department of English  
and Literary Studies



The  
**L**iterary  
Fulcrum  
Issue 4

2024

The Literary Fulcrum

2024

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## Table of Contents

<b>Welcome Note</b>	3
<b>Preface</b>	5
<b>Section 1: POETRY</b>	6
1. An Elegy to Clarissa by Inshrah Faisal	7
2. Mary by Ayesha Maqbool	8
3. The Heart by Afza Muazzam	9
4. It is Ok, Not to be OK by Maha Rashid	10
5. You can be just a Man in the World's Eye by Shahzeen Tahir	11
6. Home by Amina Mehmood	13
7. An Open Cage by Nimra Batool	14
8. The God You See by Adeena Yaqoob	15
9. Hero by Marwa Saleem	16
10. Love or War? by Syeda Faiza Babar	17
11. Agony by Aiza Khan	17
12. A Girl from Your Mother's Hometown by Romeesa Rizwan	18
13. Searching for Myself by Azka Chaudhary	19
14. I wonder by Ayesha Abdul Wadood	19
15. Don't Cry Over Spilt Milk by Zoya Hassan	20
16. Reflection in the Mirror by Usfa Athar	22
17. Ethereal Escape by Hifza Iqbal	23
18. Voyage by Isha Gulzar	24
<b>Section 2: MEMOIR</b>	26
1. A Poetic Petite Memoir by Rabiya Aamir	27
2. Remnants of the Past by Ishvah Khan	37
3. Metamorphosis by Siddiqua Iftikhar	39
<b>Section 3: SHORT STORY</b>	41
1. What was my Fault by Nawa Sohail	42
2. The Season of Blossom by Kinza Khalid	43
3. Her by Ayesha Maqbool	44
4. Uff Da by Muhammad Numan	48
5. The Wizardly Flower by Ifra Shaique Siddiqui	51
6. The Carnage by Muhammad Sheharyar Khan	53
7. Beauty by Ayesha Abdul Wadood	55
<b>Section 4: TRANSLATION</b>	58
1. An Apple a Day by Raza Naeem	59
2. O Innocent Heart! What has Stricken You by Mah-e-Nao	60
<b>Section 5: ARTWORK</b>	61
1. Inspiration: Claude Monet's Flowers on the Banks of Seine Near Vétheuil by Neha Azhar	62
2. Inspiration: Henri Matisse's Harmony in Red by Muhammad Bin Abbas	63
3. Inspiration: Charles Courtney Curran's May Morning by Laiba Tahir	64
4. Nocturnal Solitude by Laiba Amjad	65
5. Springtime Serenade by Fizzah Kafeel	66
6. Inspiration: Paul Klee's Senecio by Aqsa Kousar	67
7. Inspiration: Claude Monet's White Water Lilies by Aleena Haider	68
8. A Symphony of Broken Light by Muhammad Hammad Ali	69
9. Inspiration: Ronell Ganz's Be Still Painting	70

10. Inspiration: Anshul Kush Dixit's The Couple and the Bonfire by Laiba Amjad	71
<b>About "The Literary Fulcrum"</b>	72
<b>PATRON'S MESSAGE</b>	73

## Welcome Note

Today, as I press the keys to draft the welcome note to the fourth edition of TLF, I am haunted by the uneasy delays the magazine faced during the time of its inception in 2019. I was keen on launching it but somehow whoever became a part of its preparation either moved elsewhere or remained stuck in charting out the preliminaries. For a long time, the window to imagination and the door to the world of creative thought remained closed, allowing only soft whiffs escape the crevices. But for how long? The winds got stronger and the ruptures turned into cracks which in turn gave freedom to unbound expression that settled on the literary floor in less time than expected. Within a few years the magazine gained an identity which has made it possible for it to fetch the prestigious mention in the 'New Journal' Category of Bibliography on Pakistan published in *Literature, Critique, and Empire Today* and compiled by Ms. Muneeza Shamsie.

The trajectory of magazine's journey has urged me to share with you my philosophy about closed and contained places. Closed spaces with doors, although, give a sense of security and privacy, perceived from another angle manifest our bordered existence. They curb the free and easy access to places, spaces, and faces. Their opening is conditioned by need and their closure by institutional and personal limits. In certain contexts, they encourage authority, absolute power, and oppression. On the one hand they nurture the idea of safe haven which could just be a delusion and on the other hand, they promote the myth of hostile outside (which may not be so). If one does not have the power to open them, they are debilitating and if one has the power, they isolate one from the rest of the world. To me, this is what they represent:

Bordered doors

Moulded doors

Doors are doors

Opened or closed

Threshold defined

Build to blind

Made to trap

The peace of mind

Names embossed

Visions enclosed

Framed to tame

The spirits unchained

Hinged to walls

Barred with rods  
Fastened to souls  
With locks and bolts.

These are the doors barring our imagination to take flight and rise. Once opened they free us from the bounds of time and space. I invite you all to become a part of this boundless flight and unfasten your souls to immerse in the charms spread around but mostly ignored.

Let us see the unseen!

**Dr Nadia Anwar**

Editor-in-Chief, The Literary Fulcrum

## Preface

The fourth edition of *The Literary Fulcrum* celebrates the art of weaving threads in the depth of creativity. This issue represents an evolving mosaic of voices, perspectives and genres, showcasing the diversity in the contributors' talent across Pakistan. In this issue, "Section 1: Poetry" aestheticizes the spectrum of human emotions from tenderness to nostalgia highlighting the works such as "An Elegy to Clarissa" by Inshrah Faisal, "Searching for Myself" by Azka Chaudhary and "Ethereal Escape" by Hifza Iqbal. "Section 2: Memoir" offers an intimate glimpse into lived experiences, with poignant pieces like "A Poetic Petite Memoir" by Dr. Rabiya Aamir and "Remnants of the Past" by Ishvah Khan touching upon the theme of memory, resilience and change. These memoirs capture the memories where history and personal narratives intertwine in ways that give voice to the unheard melodies. "Section 3: Short Story" shares the works which are an interplay of melancholy and beauty where love and loss unfold with a quiet grace that lingers in the heart long after the words have faded. "Section 4: Translation" negotiates with universal and catastrophic truths under the flavor of local cultures and highlights Mah-e-Nao's ways of re-envisioning Ghalib in 21st century through her translation "O, Innocent Heart! What has Stricken you?" in which she entangles Ghalib's vision of love and identity with loneliness, longingness and belongingness beyond temporal and spatial borders. "Section 5: Artwork" is a visual feast. Neha Azhar's Interpretation of Monet's "Flowers on the Banks of Seine" and Muhammad Hammad Ali's "A Symphony of Broken Light" evoke a dialogue between light and shadow, and chaos and harmony. Every piece within these pages reflects the dedication and passion of its author, making this issue a true collective effort. My gratitude extends to our contributors for sharing their art, to the editorial team for their tireless work, and to our readers, who fuel this endeavour.

May you find your inspiration and joy as you journey through these pages. The Literary Fulcrum has now emerged as a space for voices that inspire and connect us all.

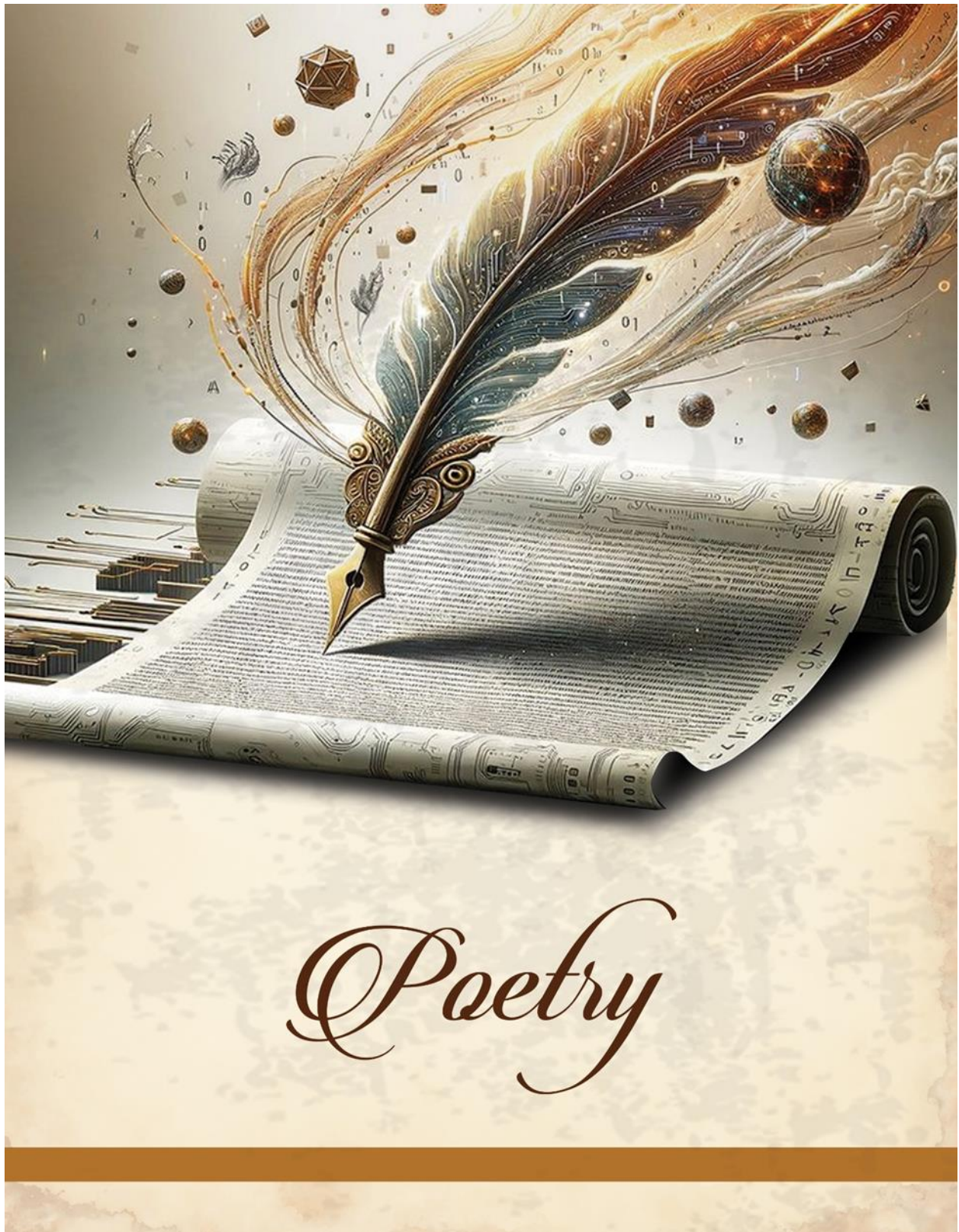
Happy Reading!

### **Muhammad Numan**

Managing Editor, The Literary Fulcrum

Lecturer, Department of English and Literary Studies

School of Liberal Arts



# Poetry

## An Elegy to Clarissa

*Inshrah Faisal*  
*BS English Literature, Session: 2023-2027*  
*Air University, Islamabad*

Oh, shield maiden of virtue,

Oh, rose of delight,

How far did you fall?

How dreary was your plight?

In meadows where love and trust should stay,

A shadowed fiend did stalk your path

Left by kin, denounced by love,

How deep did Lovelace's betrayal cut?

Alone, you wandered,

Scared and bereft,

Praying to whom, you did not know,

Asking, "Is there anyone left?"

Alas, in death you found your final peace,

A soul in chains finding its release.

Oh, fair haired lass, go now to the land of milk and honey

And teach the veiled maidens there:

"That when love, innocence and virtue, all are lost,

What is the price? And what is the cost?"

## Mary

*Ayesha Maqbool*  
*BS English Literature, Session: 2020-2024*  
*University of Sargodha, Sargodha*

Mary,  
It's happening again  
It's raining again  
The interrupted memories  
The mystic tragedies  
Are creeping in again  
I feel haunted again  
The giggles, the riddles  
The chaos, the solace  
The comfort, the thunder  
The laughter, the burden  
Are prevailing again  
The pure love, Your pure love  
Your pretty face,  
Your silky hair  
I see them again  
I feel them again  
Oh, it's raining again  
You're haunting me again  
The tragic cycle  
The magical swaddle  
Are repeating again  
While I stand here in vain  
Soaking in rain

Missing you again

Loving you again

### **The Heart**

*Afza Muazzam*

*BS English*

*Bahria University, Islamabad*

All but what remains is strength,  
Not of the brain, but the heavy heart.  
Every waking moment, despaired,  
Made the bed and brushed our teeth.

Said, "it's another day we must pass,  
To breathe again as dawn breaks".  
To bathe in the glow the sun claims,  
Incandescent and so cherished.

We take our place that we deserve,  
Rest by the tree of our seeds sowed.  
Draw maps of our mistakes,  
And call them life lessons.

While there is light, there is hope,  
Mud that makes our boots of journey.  
Lasts us to the end of the road,  
Where nightfall and paranoia meet.

We take turns to get scared easy,

Darkness chipping away our sanity.  
 Trees we planted; lost in the woods,  
 Paths we traipse, now mere ghosts.

Brave the hours sunless and cold,  
 Sit by the fire we lit with our coats.  
 Read the stories we wrote those days,  
 Wit was with us, but now we are estranged.

It is the inky black our fear feeds on  
 Snubbed out by the first ray of sunshine  
 Kissing the forest canopy alive  
 And let it be known to all, far and wide:  
 The fiery heart survived its good fight.

### **It is OK, Not to be OK**

*Maha Rashid*  
*BS English Literature, Session: 2020-2024*  
*University of Haripur, Haripur*

Sometimes it is OK, not to be OK,  
 Sometimes it is OK when your clouds turn grey,

You will feel down in your blue days,  
 You will feel left away,

You may not reach those light rays,  
 You will be all alone on that way,

It is possible, your loved ones don't stay,  
They will not come to sing a song and to play,

Their hearts will be tough as clay,  
You will feel yourself at bay,

Love is astray,  
And you have to accept it and obey,

Your friends will be elves and fays,  
And they will also betray,

It is OK if you don't feel good today,  
God will be listening to your pray.

### **You can be Just a Man in the World's Eye**

*Shahzeen Tahir*  
*BS English Literature, Session: 2020-2024*  
*The Women University, Multan*

You can be just a man in the world's eye  
But for me, you are more than this little sky  
"Do you love him?"  
The people - who are down in the mouth - ask.  
I reply - "To love someone is not a trashy task"  
The road to love without you, I can't cross  
And leaving you behind will be my greatest loss  
  
I love you and most of all your eyes

Without you, in this terrible world, I only have cries  
Life is versed into a rhythm when it's composed with the beloved's pens  
I always wake up and you sleep when the sunrise happens  
I will be in the land of the living where you always stay  
Assure me that, from me, you are never going to be away

I want to walk along with you on roads, and, to the world it'll be a surprise  
I love your voice and  
When your thoughts, passions and emotions are vocalized,  
My heart and brain both are energized  
In a love story, I hate those, who for their ego, are antagonized  
Among all the chatters of love, your voice like gold dust is rare  
When I shot in dark for love, only for you I care

Since your love has conquered me, I myself am authorized  
I'm so grateful to you for choosing me from a store of choice  
I always listen to you, when this world is full of cracking noise  
We exchange love with each other, and for this we don't need to purchase an invoice...

Love is always unintentional, not begotten by chance  
I don't know how to dance, but your love songs let me dance

Our love will remain strong, because it's made of love-idolized alloys  
We will love each other, while the entire world seeing us annoyed.

## Home

*Amina Mehmood*

*Lecturer, Department of English and Literary Studies  
University of Management and Technology, Lahore*

Home is where your heart is  
But what if your heart is scattered everywhere  
Then where is home?  
It is torn between memory and desire.  
It is in people we love,  
In faces we yearn to see,  
In places we want to be.  
Home is a person whose presence we cherish and crave for,  
A touch blooming the soul,  
A lingering cadence leaving the heart go wild.  
Home is sitting under the Bunyan tree,  
Carelessly inhaling the petrichor,  
Letting the time slip away  
While watching the sun melting into the evening sky.  
Home is being away from home, home is homesickness.  
Home is in exile, home is homecoming.  
Home is nowhere, home is everywhere.  
Home is our heart that aches,  
Home is peace settling into the soul.  
Home is within us,  
It is in the love that our heart harbors.  
Home is a paradox striving for a fine balance!

## An Open Cage

Nimra Batool

M.Phil English Literature, Session: 2023-2025  
University of Management and Technology, Lahore

I dreamt of becoming a *butterfly*,  
Who could fly high in her own sky  
But you clipped my wings and made me cry,  
I was left with nothing but a heavy sigh.

I dreamt of becoming a *fairy*,  
Who could bring goodness to all the weary  
But you came like a monster, who was scary  
And took all the goodness, I used to carry.

I dreamt of becoming a *pen*,  
Which could write freely without any assent  
But you were just like many other men,  
Who blunted my nib and turned me silent.

I dreamt of living like a *human being*,  
Who could help those who are grieving  
But you crushed my heart without even seeing,  
That I wasn't really living, but only breathing.

Now, I am yearning for an eternal farewell  
Would you let me die in my own shell?  
Or would you continue to cast your magic spell,  
Forcing me to live in your *well of hell*?

## The God you Seek

*Adeena Yaqoob*

*M.Phil Applied Linguistics, Session: 2024-2026  
University of Management and Technology, Lahore*

Hidden behind the shadows of this world,  
Man seeking you, as his thoughts unfurl.  
In swirling depths, he hopes to find your trace,  
Yet unaware, you dwell within his own embrace.

He scours the earth, pursuing endless quests,  
Chasing illusions, neglecting his own chest.  
For in his being, your essence resides,  
But blinded by desires, he seeks far and wide.

He gazes upon mountains, reaching for the skies,  
Hoping to unearth you, where the eagle flies.  
He explores vast oceans, their depths unfurled,  
Longing to discover you within this world.

Yet, you're not confined by earthly bounds,  
Nor tethered to the treasures that man surrounds.  
You're the whisper in the wind, the fire's glow,  
The love that blossoms, the seeds that sow.

In every beating heart, you gently reside,  
Guiding souls on their journey, a constant tide.  
But man, in his restlessness, fails to see,

Your divine presence, within and free.

So, cease the endless twirl, oh searching soul,

Pause and listen, let the truth unfold.

For the God you seek, in distant lands afar,

Is closer still, within you, as a shining star.

## Hero

*Marwa Saleem*

*BS English Literature, Session: 2021-2025*

*University of Management and Technology, Sialkot Campus*

The hero of daughters

Here, I present fathers

They protect from every fear

They can't see daughter's tear

They face every stream

To complete their daughter's dream

They give them wings

And tolerate their mood swings

For soothing their daughter

They stand with a glass of water

In short, anger of a daughter

Can only be tolerated by a father

They struggle their whole life

Just to see their daughter's smile

Here, I salute Fathers

The first heroes of daughters.

## Love or War?

*Syeda Faiza Babar*

*M.Phil Applied Linguistics, Session: 2021-2023  
University of Management and Technology, Lahore*

Is it love or warfare?

I have to win or there's no way back

Is this my heart or a royal fort to be stormed?

Confessions and battle seem the same sort

Are you my lover or an enemy?

Surrendering my heart, I yield to your victory

This battle of love you've won, and defeated I stand

Are love and war the same thing? In wonder I am

## Agony

*Aiza Khan*

*BS International Relations, Session: 2022-2026  
University of Management and Technology, Lahore*

There is chaos again

The chains of the storm have tied me up again

My demons have hung me against the wall

The cry for myself has started again

The mountains on my shoulders are becoming heavier

The pain has turned into the house of agony

The holy has turned into an unholy version

The crawling roots are pulling me into the depth

The depth that I am going to be buried in

Bury like none other, the house of a demon in agony

## A Girl from your Mother's Hometown

*Rumeesa Rizwan*

*BS International Relations, Session: 2023-2027*

*University of Management and Technology, Sialkot Campus*

I've seen you around,

Watched you grow up

Into a man.

Seen you play football,

Happy with your life. You came back to me then,

All sweaty and giggling.

Now that you're grown up,

You hardly come down here.

Sitting at your desk at work,

Now when you do come back to me,

You're sad and it makes me sad.

But I'll be here,

Waiting for you to drop by,

In August or September.

Moments of delicacy,

With sweet tastes to them,

A smile on your lips,

Warm touches.

I wish to see you soon,

When you're back here,

In this small town,  
To meet your grandma.

### **Searching for Myself**

*Azka Chaudhary*  
*BS English Literature, Session: 2020-2024*  
*University of Management and Technology, Lahore*

In the dawn of light,  
I have seen the night,  
In front of my eyes,  
Of everything on which I compromise,  
In the dawn of happiness,  
I've seen myself drowning into sadness,  
In front of my eyes,  
Of everything that swallowed my emotions,  
In the midst of chaos,  
I have seen myself burning in my own ashes,  
Of everything that is now left in rusts,  
In the dawn of dust,  
I am searching for myself in the midst of fog,  
Of everything which my mind handles.

### **I Wonder**

*Ayesha Abdul Wadood*  
*BS English Literature, Session: 2021-2025*  
*University of Management and Technology, Lahore*

I wonder how it feels to be loved,  
To have your soul embraced, gently shoved

Into the warmth of another's heart,  
Where every moment feels like a fresh start.  
Does it feel like sunshine on a rainy day,  
Or a soothing melody when skies are gray?  
To be the reason for someone's smile,  
Even if the world seems to beguile.  
Do whispers of affection dance in your ear,  
Erasing every shadow, every fear?  
In the embrace of love's tender grace,  
Do you find your sanctuary, your sacred space?  
Yet in the depths of night's silent plea,  
I wonder if love truly sets you free.  
For with every joy, there's a touch of pain,  
A longing for love that's not in vain.  
So, I'll wander through this endless maze,  
Searching for love in its myriad ways.  
Hoping one day to truly understand,  
The magic of love's gentle hand.

### **Don't Cry Over Spilt Milk**

*Zoya Hassan*

*M.Phil English Literature, Session: 2023-2025  
University of Management and Technology, Lahore*

With a hush and a rush,  
Fell from my hands a brush,  
It landed with a clang,  
And I heard a soft bang.

Then I picked it up,  
And placed it in my cup,  
Then I heard a splash,  
And came out a sigh from my mouth.

O my forgetful mind  
Which I had to rewind  
To the time where I put  
A bittersweet coffee in it.

So, I said "o well,  
Whatever happens, happens"  
Cause that's how things come and go,  
To a place beyond the hollows.  
But fear not my fellows,  
Cause that's how the world works.

Don't lament the loss,  
Cause what's gone is gone,  
And what's to come will come.

Then there came a few lines,  
In my crowded mind.  
Which I forgot,  
But so, what  
Let's move on.  
Then there will come,

Some new lines,  
With maybe some divines.  
So don't lament the loss,  
Don't lament the loss.

### Reflection in the Mirror

*Usfa Athar*

*BS English Literature, Session: 2023-2027  
University of Management and Technology, Lahore*

People called her cold and impassive  
Vexed with the idea of the world around  
They pitied her for being emotionless  
I pitied her for being strong and young

People hated her for being selfish  
No one noticed her hands quivering  
Was choosing oneself ever this hard?  
Was loving oneself such a war?

They said she was incapable of long talks  
Her diary could be one to evince  
Even the ice melts but not her  
But I could see the cracks within

I see her reflection  
With longing and resentment  
The mirror was all fine  
So how could I see the cracks inside.

## Ethereal Escape

*Hifza Iqbal*

*MS Biochemistry, Session: 2022-2024*

*University of Management and Technology, Lahore*

Beneath the sky's vast, celestial array,  
Shall we venture to that land far away?  
To lands of dreams, where hope takes flight,  
And souls soar free, bathed in golden light.

There, butterflies with wings so bright,  
Carry away all burdens of the night.  
Laughter echoes, joy forever reigns,  
No lonely hearts, no sorrow stains.

Love whispers sweet, a gentle call,  
No bitter goodbyes, no tears to fall.  
Trust finds its home, a haven true,  
Where fears dissolve, bathed in morning dew.

Flowers bloom in every shade and hue,  
Their vibrant beauty paints the sky blue.  
The stars shine brightly in the sky,  
Whisper secrets as the hours fly.

Upon the breeze, melodies take flight,  
Passions bloom, free from worldly plight.  
No burden of work, no frantic chase,  
A land of peace, a tranquil embrace.

Didn't the thought stir your soul's delight?  
Paint the imagination in hues, a vivid flight.  
Release your mind, let it roam and dare,  
To a realm of fantasy, beyond compare.

## **Voyage**

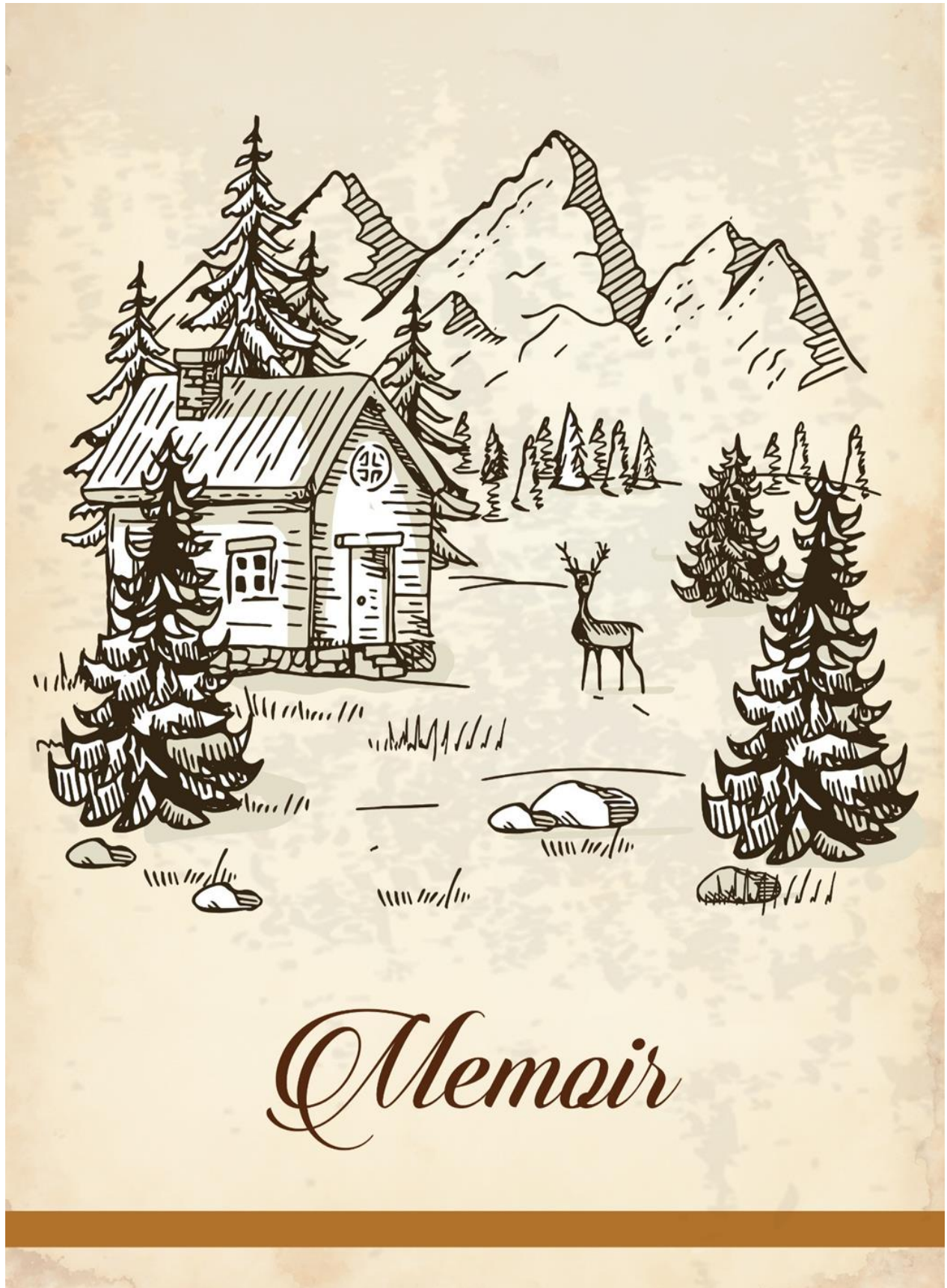
*Isha Gulzar*

*BS English Literature, Session: 2020-2024  
University of Management and Technology, Sialkot Campus*

Let's go home, we are late  
The Night is approaching from a white gate  
The birds and colours are long gone  
Only the old trees are standing alone  
  
Shadows and ghosts are roaming around  
While the meager fairies are nowhere to be found  
The rustic bones will prick your feet  
And the smell of blood is never sweet  
  
The mist is slowly erasing the trail  
And blocking the sight of a nightingale  
But a dulcet song will reach your ears  
And the crimson breeze will burn your fears  
  
So along the way hold your hands  
And think of life and friendship bands  
Of the scent that lingers around your mom

Think of stars on the sky dome

The journey to home is bound to end  
But tell me about those hours you spend  
Lying in the shade of the mighty Sun  
Thinking about the night where it all began.



## A Poetic Petite Memoir<sup>1</sup>

*Rabiya Aamir*

*Assistant Professor, Faculty of Arts and Humanities  
National University of Modern Languages, Islamabad*

Ever-Present Yester Times

Five decades, Concentric Circles of Laxmi Mansion, and Life in the *Heart* of Lahore

### Prologue

“How many boys have you got, Sahab?”

“Two.”

“Well! Getting two to three quashed is a routine in such matters.”

“.....”

I

### My Father and Laxmi Mansion

What you would read in the coming lines

Are the petit récits of ever-present yester-times.

A coming-of-age saga of a people from over the border

To inhabit the milieu in the heart of Lahore

One of the ‘Bante brothers,’ as Tarar<sup>2</sup> would call them

Later be known as ‘Wali,’ in Lahore Supreme Court,

Yet, all the wit, humor, and larking as a nineteen-year-old.

Coming year, his neighbor, Manto Sahab would be no more.

Leaving Amritsar’s Qureshi lodge,<sup>3</sup> his family eventually moves to this abode,

Laxmi Insurance Company evacuates this mansion they built in the 30s in Lahore.

Migrating folks, pre- and post-partition, are adjusted in this milieu’s homes.

Ever-growing family of Muslims, Parsis, and Christians peaceably living,<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> First published in *World Line* Vol. 1 Issue VI June 2022. pp. 76-84.

<sup>2</sup> In his novel *Raakh*, Mustansar Hussain Tarar calls these brothers of a family, sons of Ghulam Ali Qureshi, as ‘bante bratheran’ (p 79) because of their short statures. One of these brothers is Mahmood A Qureshi, my father.

<sup>3</sup> Ghulam Ali Qureshi, my Grandfather, a businessman in Amritsar migrated to Pakistan and was adjusted in this house in Laxmi Mansion, bought other properties like Ravi Textile Mills, and a few other places. The Qureshi lodge in Amritsar is now owned by a bank when its pictures were taken by my Chacha in 2004.

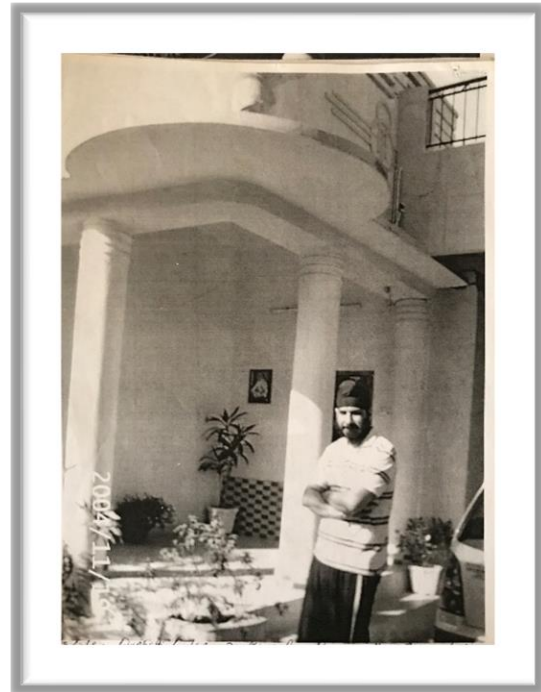
<sup>4</sup> My personal experience. Also mentioned in *Raakh* (p 92).

With the Sidhwas, the Paymasters, the Bakhshs, the Mantos, on their left.

Khursheed Shahid, Salman Shahid, and Mahmood Ali Malik<sup>5</sup> in the front.

On one side Nadir Feroz's abode, while Shah and Samar sahibs,<sup>6</sup> the other,

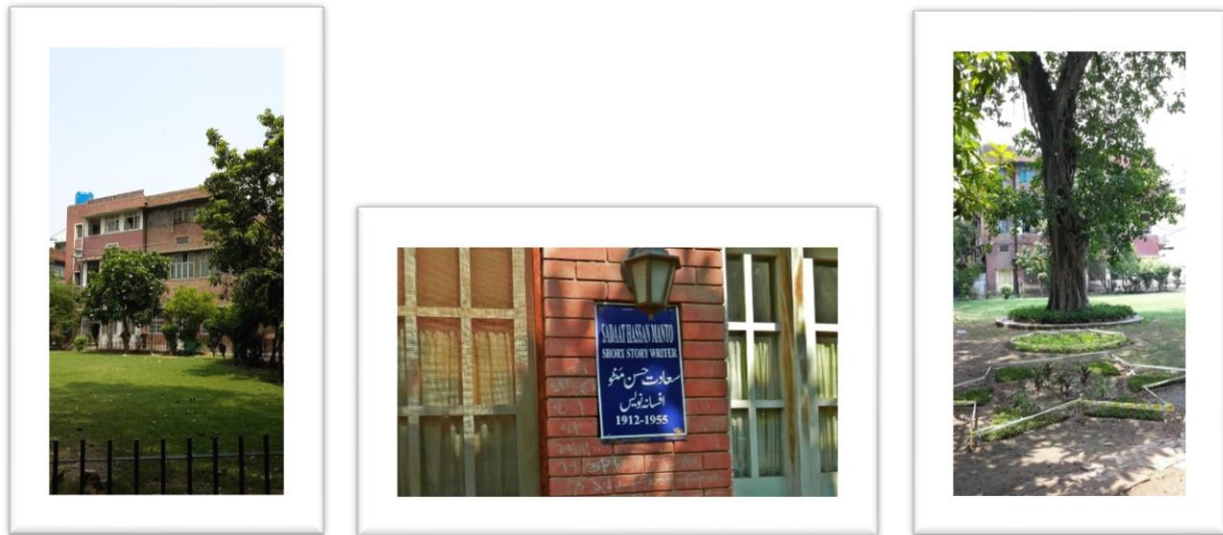
And outer concentric circle of mansion, housed men of letters like Tarar.



**Qureshi Lodge Amritsar, India**

<sup>5</sup> Prof. Dr. Mahmood Ali Malik, Diabetologist and Endocrinologist, a great name in the medical world, was my father's good friend and our neighbor in Laxmi Mansion. <https://oladoc.com/pakistan/lahore/dr/diabetologist/mahmood-ali-malik/334685>

<sup>6</sup> Munir Shah and Samar Jamil Khan were my father's very close friends. Samar uncle's elder sister, Brigadier Saeeda Akhtar was the first lady in Pakistan to rise to this rank. She is the mother of the famous poet and Woman of Letters, Yasmeen Hameed.



**Left to Right: Manto Sahab and Malik Meraj Khalid's houses; Manto Sahab's house; A View from the central park/ground of the adjacent block to Manto House**

The Rustams, the Laris, Fazal Dins, and senator Mian Ihsans; while Meraj Khalid,<sup>7</sup> G M Asar,<sup>8</sup> and Hamid Jalal enrich the eclectic context.

The Badiuddins, their Aligarh pal, land here from Deccan Hyderabad.

His journey of youth begins. This cosmopolitan experience shapes him the best.

Where, old and young sip tea in overlooking balconies, watching children play

Relishing the shady ground with two big oaks, gulcheens, and lots of flower beds

Though the nastarans around the oak trees or the seasons blossoms get trampled,

When, instead of badminton, taking fancy to cricket, they place fielders around.

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<sup>7</sup> Malik Meraj Khalid (01 Feb 1916 – 13 June 2003), was an advocate, a Pakistani left-wing politician and Marxist philosopher who served as Prime Minister of Pakistan in an acting capacity from November 1996 until February 1997. He was noted as being one of the original philosophers and founding personalities of the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP). He was a very close friend of my father.

<sup>8</sup> One of the eminent professors at Government College University, Lahore and father of Salma Baig, wife of Obaidullah Baig.



One view of the central ground



**Left: Mahmood A. Qureshi (My Father) in conversation with Malik Meraj Khalid (extreme right); My Chacha Shaukat Ali Qureshi (center) (1997); Right: Saadat Hasan Manto with nephew Hamid Jalal Lahore 1948**

This blue-eyed boy of the neighborhood, Lahore's number two for Badminton  
 Only because his brother is number one from Hailey; he is from Law College.  
 When he comes of age, his mother's wish to marry him to her niece is met with  
 A silly prank, typical of any young man's age. He puts his badminton partners,  
 The Sidhwa's sisters, in his car, lands at the doorstep of the prospective uncle.  
 The chapter thus closes with a loud thud shut. His badminton posts, one near  
 Manto Sahab's house, the other in the big ground's center, continue to give  
 The youth's usual jangle, clatter, chirping and laughter for the balconies around.



**Left: Second Left, Muneer Shah, and extreme right Mahmood A. Qureshi; Center: Extreme left Shaukat (No 1 in Badminton of his time), Mahmood in the center and his elder brother Ashraf; Right: Mahmood in the Center**

As junior of Barrister Ijaz Batalvi<sup>9</sup> and consociate of Raja Muhammad Anwar<sup>10</sup>

Mahmood<sup>11</sup> grows to be a promising lawyer, becoming, legal advisor for USAID, Millat Tractors, Faletti's Hotel, and more. Faletti's, where Justice Cornelius<sup>12</sup> resided, And, where the father of our nation for defending Ghazi IIm Din's case, stayed.<sup>13</sup>

Quaid-e-Azam's official photographer, Faustin Elmer Chaudhry,<sup>14</sup> was his friend.

The same Faustin aka 'Chacha,' whose son Cecil Chaudhry, is our pride and war legend.

Such was the milieu of the Lahore that I grew in, though would not be there,

For many years to come. Yet the ambience of the mansion exuberated connaissance.

<sup>9</sup> Ijaz Hussain Batalvi, a Lincoln's Inn Barrister born in Batala, India, Sub-Continent before independence on September 7, 1923. Later his parents migrated to Pakistan and settled in Lahore. He was my father's mentor, and his law firm was the one he joined as a junior lawyer.

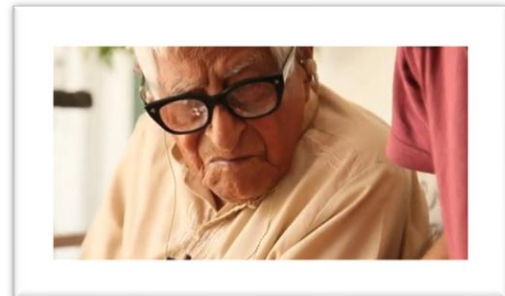
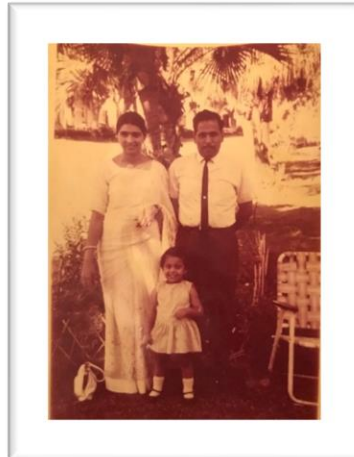
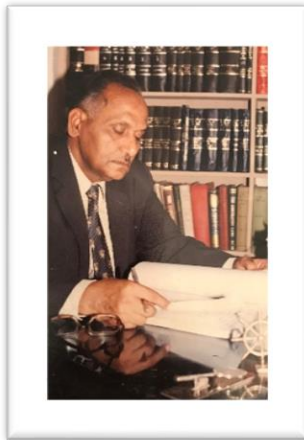
<sup>10</sup> Raja Mohammad Anwar was a dear friend of my father. An article entitled "Tributes paid to Raja Anwar" may be accessed at: <https://fp.brecorder.com/2005/04/20050420235886/>

<sup>11</sup> Mahmood A. Qureshi, my father, was an Advocate on Record of Supreme Court of Pakistan. He was awarded shield as "Tribute to 'Golden History' of Bar" in 2015, two years prior to his death in 2017.

<sup>12</sup> Chief Justice Alvin Robert Cornelius (8 May 1903 – 21 December 1991), *HPK (Hilal e Pakistan)*, was a Pakistani jurist, legal philosopher and judge, serving as the 4th Chief Justice of Pakistan from 1960 until 1968. While he was working in the capacity of a judge of High Court, he honored my father (who had recently begun practicing in Lahore High Court) by advising him to apply for license to practice in Supreme Court, saying that "people like you are needed there."

<sup>13</sup> Quaid-e-Azam stayed here in 1929. The reference may be accessed at: <https://www.youlinmagazine.com/article/faletti-lahore-hotel-of-history/MTc5NQ==>  
<https://falettihotel.com/news/single-news/6>

<sup>14</sup> F. E. Chaudhry's daughter and Cecil Chaudhry's sister, Dr. Stella is still my mother's very dear friend. Also see the article "Remembering a Legend" by Tahir Kamran. It can be accessed at: <https://www.thenews.com.pk/tns/detail/565144-remembering-legend>



**Left: Mahmood A. Qureshi in his study; Center: My father, mother, and myself at Falleti's 1971; Right: F. E. Chaudhry**

## II

### My Father, Mother, and Laxmi Mansion

Mahmood is now destined to finally marry his friend's wife's best friend.

The girl hated Lahore, never wanted to ever come here, yet had to be placed

Right in midst of the greatest hustle bustle of this mansion's buoyant family.

Now a writer of eight books,<sup>15</sup> proves quite dynamic, befriending ladies around.

For fifteen years, an entrepreneur, she teaches girls of the environs of Lahore.

The lady from Hyderabad Deccan, lady Miraj Khalid, lady Manto, and lady Jalal,<sup>16</sup>

Lady Munawar, Lady Durrani, Lady Shah, Kaka, Rati, and Mehru Rustam,

She is endeared by all. While quiet Paymaster Jinny and Balaji, are revered by all.

<sup>15</sup> Nusrat Mahmood Qureshi, a writer of 8 books, is now also running her YouTube channel named *Granny Nam*. It can be accessed at: <https://youtu.be/8bLU2icD5PA>, <https://youtu.be/rqTSc5-7bYA>, <https://youtu.be/TxjffQAQzow>, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X4Q\\_VPIyYtg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X4Q_VPIyYtg), [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w-xS68SR-DA&ab\\_channel=GrannyNam](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w-xS68SR-DA&ab_channel=GrannyNam), <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCZPRdzMssKtU5yByk6iepAA>.

<sup>16</sup> Hamid Jalal, a bureaucrat himself and father of Aysha Jalal, the great historian, lived in the flat above Manto's. He was Manto Sahab's nephew and also his brother-in-law, as Safia Apa and Zakia Apa (Jalal's wife) were sisters. Balaji was Manto Sahab's widowed sister who lived on the top floor of the building of their flat. Most of these pieces of information in this poem are provided by my mother, Nusrat Mahmood Qureshi.



**Safia Apa, Zakia Apa, Manto Sahab, and little Nighat (She is one year younger than my mom)**

This mansion, off Mall Road, near Regal Chawk and the hotspot of Frosty Malt<sup>17</sup>

Houses such a diverse crowd. Where Safia Apa candidly can say to Mahmood:

*'Meri Jan: Mein duron dekh rahi saan; aidi smart kuri, Moode! Ae tenu kine de diti?'*<sup>18</sup>

This girl, soon to become Safia Apa's confidant, a shopping partner, and a dear friend.

Ladies frequenting each other's houses, exchanging dishes, and ideas for dress designing.

Where, Nadir Feroze, my dad's friend, takes us to Lahore Zoo; enjoys our amazed

Faces, when he treats us by going in the lion's cage, talks to animals; and showing

The animals as friends. Though he recites *Durood* all the time, he tells my mum.

<sup>17</sup> See for instance: <https://nation.com.pk/01-Jul-2010/beating-the-heat>

<sup>18</sup> My mother, Nusrat, is walking ahead of my father Mahmood and Safia Apa, jovially makes this comment on their way to Manto Sahab's place, which may roughly be translated as: 'O my! I was watching this pretty girl coming and wondering who gave her hand to you Mahmood?'



**Left: Frosty Malty and the adjacent road leading to Laxmi Mansion; Center: Khan Lala's (Johar Abbass) Juice Corner; Right: Nawaz Sharif canvassing in Laxmi Mansion (c 1985) and Mahmood A. Qureshi**

Where, my dad accidentally forgets about me, and I walk out of the house, only to be Picked by Khan Lala<sup>19</sup> and made to sit in his juice shop, not knowing whose child I was. When my fretful parents looked for the toddler, Lala could guess Mahmood as father. Such a safe neighborhood! And the luxury of having Mahmood Ali Malik as a doctor. With Obaidullah Baig becoming the son in law of G M Asar, while Salma Baig Is known for hosting PTV programs and her services to the field of education. With all residents working together to keep the environment safe and sound, while Politicians like Nawaz Sharif take their first political flight from the grounds of Laxmi Mansion.

### III

#### Finale

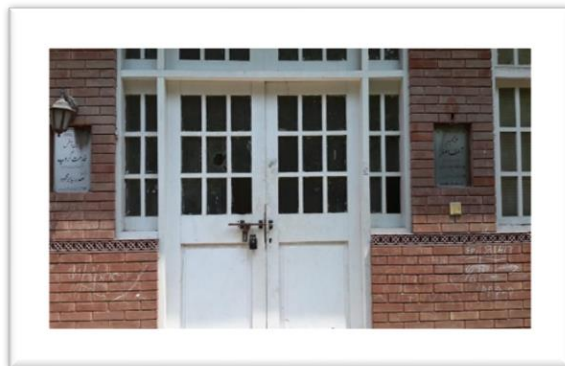
Thus, with the vicinages of Laxmi Mansion as Regal, Falleti's, Avari, and Ferozsans, Abode of Mian Bashir,<sup>20</sup> Quaid e Azam Library, Punjab University, and Tollinton The sad demise of the heritage of this place was fought back by the residents, To their last, till the mercantile lobby dig in their vampire teeth. And as they say, The murphy's law sets in. None of the residents have the strength to stand against This mafia, and eventually, are made to give in. They have to leave one by one.

<sup>19</sup> Khan Lala's real name is Johar Abbass which I only came to know recently through this 2013 article in *DAWN*, "Manto's Laxmi" by Akhtar Balouch. It can be accessed at: <https://www.dawn.com/news/1073890>

<sup>20</sup> Mian Bashir Lodge is the place where Quaid-e-Azam used to stay. His son, Mian Manzar Bashir was my father's acquaintance.

The corner ones first. Till the termite eats in and eating still.<sup>21</sup> Ours was the story:

“How many sons have you got Qureshi Sahab?” While others have theirs, I am sure, to tell.



**Manto Sahab's House**

**Now converted into an office**

**Nighat Patel Manto living in Manto house, open for sale.**

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<sup>21</sup> See for instance an interview in his article “Manto's Laxmi” by Akhtar Balouch mentioned above as well and in other articles and blogs. Links may be accessed here. <https://www.dawn.com/news/1073890> , <https://www.charcoalgravel.com/lakshmi-mansion-now-a-decrepit-void/>



Nighat Apa standing in front of Manto House



Central Lawn turned into disrepair



A reminder plate of what once was

## Remnants of the Past: A Trip to Barrage

*Ishvah Khan*

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As my feet took the first few steps all the repressed memories that had been pierced into my soul, for a very long time, rushed back. I entered the Haveli after a year, a very long year indeed. I felt as if I would be crushed under the weight of my memories. I could hear the voices of people who had lived there, who had ever spoken a word in that house. The crying of a mother who lost her son in the house and the voices of Uncle Zubair who used to cheer all the children of the house. My little head started to spin while differentiating between the happy voices and the sad ones. The smell of the place continued to hurt my nostrils. I wanted to breathe one moment and wanted to stop the next moment. It was the air mixed with the smell of the dried blood of my young cousin and the sweet fragrance of my grandmother's shawl when she used to hug me. I knew I had to pull myself together, so I remembered the night when my dear father had taken us to the Barrage.

I was always afraid of the open gates of Barrage, and I used to think: "What will be left of me, If I accidentally fell into the rushing water?" The more I was scared of it, the more I wanted to stare at it. The more I stared at it, the more answers rushed down my tiny brain. I knew the fast-running water would crush me into little pieces. But I waited and waited for my father to return home and take us to see the insanely fast water that had taken lives. It was darker than usual that day and my mother turned on the lanterns. I skipped the homework that day because waiting for something has always been the hardest part for me and engages me in doing nothing else, absolutely nothing else. I saw my sister doing her homework before my father reached home and I said to myself: "how can someone be so involved in something like homework when one can think of the cold deadly rushing water of the Barrage?"

Two hours passed and the horn blew. I ran as fast as I could to see the man who was about to take us to see the horrifying scene with which I was so obsessed. Everything seemed normal because these were just thoughts. We waited for an entire day and now the wait was finally over. I hugged my father and looked into his eyes with so much love that it could take my breath away. I said to myself "he is the man who can make everything possible, who can take you to see paradise someday if you ask him to". We all sat in the Margalla and started our ten-minute trip which seemed like hours to me. I opened the window to feel the fresh air but something about the air felt surreal. I saw fireflies all the way until we reached. And there it was, the Barrage, the water waves smashing the walls and bouncing back to its gates.

The horrific idea of the Barrage began to overshadow the nostalgia of faded, not yet gone memories of the childhood days for a while. Days that were filled with colours of life, laughter of my cousins, unforgettable miseries, traumas that we all shared, weddings that took place in our haveli, deaths that

brought us all together and many unforgettable experiences I have had in the past. But the journey I took to my childhood in my head somehow made me relive the day that was lost in the fuss of fast-paced life. The imagination helped me visit the corridors of the old house, walked me under the shade of large mango trees, made me smell the beautiful winter breeze and warm summer wind, helped me understand what I had back then and what I could possibly do in life to make a difference. Suddenly, I realized that the agenda behind my uncle's silly jokes was to build a castle of memories for the kids of our house and the anger my granny showed us while waking us up in the morning when we used to sleep under the sky was to let us know that this is all she could possibly do to protect us for the time being because future might hold much more burning days. In the battle of "who sits in the front seat of school van" to "we forgot our summer-task on a trip to Lahore," we all grew up fast.

Every spot in the house had a memory of a different being or event. For instance, as I moved into the back porch of the house, it reminded me of the time when I used to run as fast as I could through that porch in order to reach that one ice-cream *wala* who had the best homemade ice-cream in the world but was accidentally shot later at someone's wedding. The happiness he used to spread among the children was matchless but the price he paid for showering his love through that small ice-cream cart could actually move the mountains of sorrow in my tiny head. Life goes on as I balance the weight of sad and happy memories; those happiest memories of all times were about my father returning home from Oman with his fully loaded bags. We siblings used to think that the most difficult time in the world was to wait for my father to land in Lahore, travel to our hometown by bus and then sleep the entire day to overcome the exhaustion of his trip. We waited for hours to have a peak at those things that were in the bags. But in reality, as Charles Dickens says "it was the best of times, it was the worst of times" because the future has made me go through the confined tunnels of challenges that were built specifically for me to cross. There were times when I had no cheering from my uncle and no protection from my granny in the sizzling summer days, but the days passed, and life kept going under the wings of the loved ones.

## Metamorphosis

*Siddiqua Iftikhar*  
*BS English Literature, Session: 2021-2025*  
*University of Management and Technology, Lahore*

When I was 12, I was a very capricious child, I remember my schoolteachers saying, '*Iske Chehre Se Shararat Tapakti Hai*' (mischievous is writ all over her face). Being the youngest of the house, I enjoyed extra privileges of unconditional love, favors, and got anything I wanted. Then one day things changed forever when one of my dad's cousins came home to get one of my father's dresses. 'Why do you need it?' I inquired, he replied that it was nothing serious and your father got into a road accident so I came to get

his dress so he can change before coming home. Being a kid who just came from school I took it as nothing serious and changed clothes and started watching television. My mother, however, got restless and went along with uncle to the hospital. While I was doing my homework one of my cousins came home along with his wife saying that they took papa to Lahore for better treatment so they would stay with us for the night. At that very moment, I felt my entire world swing, but I knew my father was an iron man and nothing would happen to him; he would outlive anyone in the world.

Two days I spent restlessly going around the house, I spent my time sitting idly staring at the picture of papa that hung in the lounge, I slept in papa's bed, used his pillow as my tear sweeper. His scent was everywhere in the house, and I enjoyed it while I could still smell it. The reality was taking place in my subconscious, but I was not allowing it to get to me. I wanted to hold onto him while I still could; the first man of my life whom I adored, idealized, and considered my whole life. I felt him everywhere, the house was filled with our happy moments; him holding me up in his arms while I faked sleeping in his bed, him carrying me on his shoulders to give me a tour of the house, me forcibly getting on the back of the bike for him to get me a cone ice-cream (a favorite thing to eat at that time), hiding behind the passenger seat when he would not agree to take me somewhere in the car, waking him up to drop me at the school while all my other siblings waited for the rickshaw to get to the same school, waking him up for extra money I needed to buy my snacks with while I went to school. All these moments and many more passed in front of my eyes like they were happening in that moment very fresh and wholesome. As I relived all those happy moments, my father laid there on the ventilator waiting for the final decision of his fate.

As a kid who was not mentally prepared to lose any of his relationships I did not show much of my emotions. Two days passed and then an ambulance came in front of my house with my father's dead body and my mother in it. At that very moment streams of people started rushing into the house to sympathize and coerce me and my sister to accept the reality that we just became orphans by losing our father. Reality hit like a gush of strong wind knocking me off my balance. One of our neighbors called me and quoted a Qur'anic verse that says, 'And We will surely test you with something of fear and hunger and a loss of wealth and lives and fruits.' 'Don't shed a tear my child else it will be a burden on your father's grave'.

I did not cry, did not shed a single tear, not when my uncles bathed my father's dead body, nor when I saw his lifeless face; he no longer smiled the moment my face came in front of his, did not extend his arms to hold me or hug me. In my mind I felt like I would pass out in fact I wanted to pass out. I wanted to faint so that when I woke up everything would be normal just like a bad dream would pass. But it was only a child's delusion which will have to face reality that my papa was no longer alive.

It was my third day without sleeping for a single moment and my papa's dead body lied in front of me. I stood on his left side for a long time, I hugged him for the last time and then walked out of the room. There were a lot of people everywhere. We could keep papa with us for only one more night so that some of the relatives who lived far could come. I saw people eagerly deciding which piece of meat they wanted

to eat. I saw my father's sister asking for tea which must contain cardamom, or she won't take it, I saw people crying their lungs out on the sad demise of their uncle. I saw my Aunts' matching bright colored freshly tailored dresses. I saw relatives seeking attention. I saw all sorts of dramas one could witness in a house where the house owner had just died. The house emptied the moment my papa was taken for burial. I held on to my mama's hand as a gesture of camaraderie and let the moment pass.

I waited for more than 7 years for my father to return but he did not. Every night I used to sleep with the hope that he would be back in the morning, but he never came back. He did not come when I needed him to fight the entire world, not when I prayed to God for a stable shelter, not when I had to beg to someone for trivial necessities, nor when my own family turned against me.

After spending 7 years in this dilemma, I finally let it seep in that I am an orphan now; someone who is at the mercy of those relatives whose moral values, thinking, and family system were entirely different from the one I was brought up in. Eventually, I did come to terms with the reality and from then on learnt to be strong, mature and independent. One thing that hurts at times is that in all this the playful little adorable girl was lost, but time waits for none, and life goes on.



## What Was My Fault?

*Nawa Sohail  
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Lahore University of Management Sciences, Lahore*

It was a lovely night with the wind softly caressing the dried leaves. A nightingale's sweet melody could be heard far away on the hills, soothing the blackened waves in the ocean. The street was dimly lit by a faint lamppost, casting a haunting glow on the dried petals strewn along the pavement. The moon was hiding behind the silver lining of the clouds. A lonely star was twinkling somewhere in the blood-red sky. Or was it burning?

The window was slightly open, inviting the night's melancholy dance into the room. She was standing in front of the mirror, wearing a red dress that was hugging her knees. Her brownish hair was tied into a ponytail, and her soft smile lit up the room. I caught a glimpse of her in the mirror and our eyes locked.

Her hazel-colored eyes widened in surprise. How could someone's eyes be deeper than an ocean? I wanted to get lost in those eyes, lose sight of myself, and hold her little finger to protect me from the waves. A soft smile flickered on the corner of her lips as if she had pierced my soul. She raised her eyebrows, and I blushed. My cheeks reddened. I could feel the blood hugging my cheeks. Were they redder than the blood on my knuckles? I shook my head. Not now. I wanted to look at her, lock her in my memory, and visit it when a shadow visits me. That shadow was visiting me more frequently.

A shiver ran down my spine and I took a deep breath, not letting my anguish carry me away. I just wanted to hold her and feel the soft texture of her skin. Will her touch free me? Or will it make me lose my mind? Why couldn't I have her? I could see her from the corner of my eye, and she was looking more beautiful than ever. Her lips were touching the cup of her hot coffee, and I wanted to trace my finger on it. I wanted to know what it felt like to be held by her.

We all crave warmth. Don't we?

I looked at my hands. They were bruised, carrying small scars. Are they really small? I looked at my jacket. It was ruffled. What could I do? My hair was a mess. I ran my fingers over the dark stubble of my cheeks. A lump formed in my throat. I tried to swallow it. Swallow everything. I looked at the candle flickering on the floor. The flame was burning. I could smell it. Could she smell it too? Could she see me? Like really see me.

She was now applying nail paint on her nails. They looked perfect. It was dark and cold. Should I give her the blanket? I looked around but couldn't find it. It was getting colder. The leaves were whispering, and the window opened.

I shivered. It was so cold. I panicked. She might catch a cold. It must be so difficult for her to be in this small cottage. Where was the blanket? Why couldn't I close the window? Why was it jammed? I rushed to close it. The nail pierced my skin, and blood fell on the floor. I hissed in pain. It was too much. My back was stinging. I was losing my mind. I didn't have time to lose. I have to do something to keep her warm. I looked under the bed to find something. But nothing could be done. There was nothing. I didn't want to look anymore and then a noise startled me.

I looked up instantly to embrace my biggest fear. I was alone. She was gone. My heart was beating louder than the beating drums. It was in my throat. Something caught my eye. A crack in the mirror. I rushed to see it. It was small but the mirror was no longer the same. I lost it. I couldn't control it anymore. I screamed over my lungs. The moon disappeared. The star burnt. I looked in the mirror.

There was a shadow with bloodshot eyes. Those eyes were burning. I smashed my hand in the mirror, slicing my finger. I unzipped my jacket and threw it away. Cut my hair. Tried to control my erratic heartbeat. Could she see my scars? Did they scare her? Or did she see the wounds that did not leave any scars? A tear fell into the ocean. It was no longer red. There was so much I wanted to say, so many unsaid things were buried within me. But why couldn't I say them? Why was my tongue tied? Will I always lurk around the dark rooms? Will I only embrace the darkness? I wanted to give her the world, but the world wasn't meant for me.

## The Season of Blossom

*Kinza Khalid*

*BS English Literature, Session: 2021-2025  
University of Management and Technology, Lahore*

On the first fall of a leaf from this old veteran tree which remained forever when everyone around him departed and gave their leave, there was a strange melancholy in it. Every time I visited it, my soul could feel the shrillness of the tree. I was always taken aback by its charming beauty of intertwining branches that beautifully scattered all over with green leaves. During summer and spring, its sight was my only relief. How many came under its shadow and countless left but still this old tree stayed. The day before I decided to end my life, I again visited it, "you still here?!" I said to this incommunicable living creature which was as alive as dead. Its inarticulate twigs spoke more than the people around me; it was plumper than the lifeless souls around me. Neither was it summer nor was it spring, it was the month of the year where all I could see tumbling lives, falling leaves, aimless streets, and purposeless endeavors.

I touched it one last time. It was its rough, shabby, dark dead trunk, which was darker than brown, rougher than the mind, sharper than the tongue, and livelier than life. As I traced my fingers through the outlines that nature carved so craftily that millions of stories spoke within every line. I said with a happy yet sorrowful voice, "I'm leaving today my firefly!" The words just had to come out and then the second last leaf

fell from the long erect branch which was tired of carrying the weight of fragile breakable nests. "You held it long, now shed the last and I let it go", these were my last words when I finally bid farewell to it. It was beautiful, radiant but yet a woeful day when I left the cold blues and yellowing hues of sky. He was still here but I was not. The veteran tree was still there but the last leaf was gone. Years passed and a kid passed from there and asked the tree curiously: "Why are you so cold when there is spring all around?" A weary heart replied: "after the fall of the last leaf its branches forgot the beauty of spring because the season of blossoms is long gone." Many springs and many summers came and went away, years and days passed but the branches have never known their beautiful charm again!!"

## Her

*Ayesha Maqbool  
BS English, Session: 2020-2024  
University of Sargodha, Sargodha*

Goodness! He grunts again. Who knew moving houses would be so difficult? He wipes off his forehead.

"And... when did I even get this couch?" he mutters.

"You didn't. It's mine," a soft voice whispers from behind.

He turns stupidly. "Oh!" Putting the couch down, "I didn't notice you there."

"I know."

"You were here all along?"

"Umm," she murmurs coyly.

"And you are just telling me this now when it's already next to my apartment door?"

"And mine," she says, winking.

"Oh. So, madam was using me as a courier."

"Umm, no sir," she bursts into laughter.

"That's foul."

"It isn't my fault that you can't even tell your own furniture."

"Ahan... I see."

"Yes, sir," she admits, smiling.

"I am not very particular about these things. My wife bought it all."

"You're married?"

Stunned by the change in tone,

"Y... ye... yeah... I mean... was. She's dead."

"Ohh," she whispers. "Nice."

"Sorry?"

"Hm. Nothing. I said I am sorry for your loss."

"Thanks. I'll go then."

"Sure, neighbor."

"Bye then."

He turns towards the door, his back facing her.

"Well... wouldn't it just be common decency to have asked whether I want you to move the couch into my apartment? I mean, it's just the way of gentlemen, you see..." (she adds flirtatiously).

"Right. Sorry. I am just too exhausted with my own stuff... D... do you want me to?"

"Not if you're gonna whine like that," she turns her back towards him and takes a step towards her door.

"I wasn't... whining. I just meant that it slipped my mind."

"What? Common decency?" She chuckles.

He scratches the back of his neck awkwardly.

"Just kidding. Come in."

She opens the door of her apartment all the way and stands leaning on the door, looking at him sheepishly.

He hesitatingly picks up the couch from one side, dragging the other, and moves into the apartment.

"Sorry. I didn't mean to be a pushover, but you understand how it is for a young, lonely lady."

"Do you live alone?" he asks as he puts the couch down.

"As of now," she replies, unbothered.

"Now?"

"Yeah." She giggles audibly. "I'll get you a drink."

"No need," he speaks hurriedly, but she has already left.

He starts looking around and stops by a bookshelf. After taking a brief look at it, he starts picking up random books and rummaging through them.

"Not so rudely, mister," she speaks harshly.

"Apologies. I was just looking."

"What's the rush?"

"Oh. Nothing. It's just that... why are all these crimes documented here?"

"Cause I love thrill," she claps with excitement, placing the drinks on the center table.

"Oh... I see."

He hesitates, sitting on the edge of the sofa.

"Don't you think it's fascinating?" Her eyes gleam with unsettling excitement.

"What?" he stammers.

"The murderers," she says with a chilling smile.

"S... sir... wh... what?" He's baffled.

"Nah. Now don't look so serious. I am just saying it's fascinating how they think so interestingly, so coyly, so secretly, so cruelly."

He stares directly at her, flabbergasted.

"Stop. Don't give me those looks as though I'm crazy or something."

"Sorry."

He gets up to leave.

"You're leaving so soon?"

"I have to."

As he's leaving, a room catches his eye. He stands there, transfixed by something.

"Something seems more attractive than me, is it, sir?" she teases.

"Oh! No. It's just something about it. As if it's asking me to stay."

"Is it?" Her voice turns dark.

His eyes suddenly widen as his curiosity turns to horror.

"What is that?"

He screams, pointing at a dark red fluid seeping under the door.

"Must be wine," she speaks, her voice calm and unyielding.

He looks at her, baffled.

"Yes, wine. Red wine."

"No! Look at the consistency! It's blood. So much blood!!"

"You seem to know the look of blood," she adds with a hint of curiosity.

"Everybody does!"

"No, not everybody."

"What are you on about?"

"Relax. It's just my husband," she puts, with an unnerving smile.

"Your husband? You said you were alone? And he's bleeding. So heavily!!"

"He's just dead, and I said I am single as of now."

"What the hell? Are you crazy? How could you be so calm?"

"Why would I panic?"

"Your husband's dead!"

"Murdered."

"Murdered?"

"Yes! You killed him," she accuses him.

"Me??" He yells, bewildered. "Wow, so you kill your husband, lure me into the apartment to put the blame on me, you really think it's that easy?? Let me tell you, it's not."

(Sighing) "Oh God. Stop yelling and own it. You killed my husband like you killed your wife."

"My wife? I didn't kill her."

"Come on now. How long are you gonna deny it for?"

"I said I didn't."

"You did and made it look so natural, even the best of murderers would be in awe."

"That's a lie. That's a lie."

"You killed your wife just like you killed my husband and, with a pause, me..."

"I didn't. I didn't kill my wife, nor your husband, neither you." (He pauses.)

"You. You're dead..."

He looks around in confusion because he's alone all of a sudden.

(Whispers) "She's disappeared. How? Why?"

He walks around crazily, suddenly stumbling over something. As he quickly turns to look back, there lies the body of the girl. Panic runs through his body.

"She's here. She's dead, and so is he. I killed them both. I killed my wife. Why would I? Did I?" (He mumbles confusingly.) Then suddenly chuckles.

"I did. Because... they were noisy," he giggled creepily, all of them annoying idiots."

He gets up, agitated, and walks away from her body.

"Now you're admitting it."

Her sheepish voice echoes.

He looks around in panic but finds no one. The dead body is still there.

"W... why are you talking to me? How can you... y... yo... you're dead!!" he stammers, eyes wide with terror.

"Am I?" She chuckles.

"Y... yes," he whispers, trembling.

"I'm not, you idiot. It's a dream. Wake up!!"

"Is it? Really?" He contemplates. "Yes, yes, it ought to be. How could I be talking to a ghost? It is a dream. This is a dream. How do I wake up??" he babbles.

"Jump through that window..." she suggests.

"Should I? It's risky..." he hesitates.

"Do it! It's just a dream. You're gonna wake up. And remember to take your medicine."

"Yes, my medicine. I'll take them. I gotta jump."

He moves toward the window, taking each step with heavy dread.

"Do it... do it... do it... do it..." her voice echoes in his head.

A loud noise is heard. He jumps, the realization hitting him too late.

Breaking News: "Illian Grey has committed suicide. The culprit ran away after killing his wife and had been evading the police for months. He leaped off an apartment's window after killing the couple that lived there. Illian Grey was a notorious serial killer. Besides these victims, it's suspected that he killed a few others too, including his own mother. Investigations are still ongoing in this regard."

"Mother. It was you all along," he says, laughing bitterly.

He saw his mother's reflection while falling down. She drove him to his death. She, who couldn't get him to eat his medicine or save any of his victims, including herself, finally won, and he lost. He couldn't even recognize his mother's voice as she drove him to his demise...

"That idiot," she says coldly.

## Uff Da<sup>22</sup>

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"Uff Da!". She just uttered spontaneously when her car was about to run on the footpath on 35W. Your response was "Ooo" that turned into a medium-level hiccup in the next moment. For you, "Uff Da" was quite an unfamiliar word in your eight-year interaction with English language and twenty-seven-year life in Pakistan. Earlier, you absorb it as a meaningless but an emotional uttering that perhaps can be positioned as an interjection in parts of speech in any language. With the little effort, you were in doubt if it was an expression carrying emotional burst.

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<sup>22</sup> Preliminary Note: This story shares a memory of longing for language transcending cultural borders and the displacement of signifier and signified within the catastrophic practice of embarking national borders.

Another beautiful Sunday, in sunlight reflecting through the dusting glass-window, sitting cross-legged across the corner chair of the dining table, you considered a fortunate day of your time in the USA. Unknowingly, due to sticking at chair for a longer period, your back was getting hard. Suddenly, you sensed something fluffy tickling on the toes of your feet. In a short time, you guessed there might be a black fatty spider who tried to climb up on your legs. Before, you could think something else, you got a jerk of your back that caused a stretching sound of bones and untying muscles after staying at one position for a long time. Your stretching sound echoed you “Uff Da”. Suddenly, turned around and saw Sophia. Having swiper in hands, she was standing in the kitchen door tilted her back slightly on the right side. She said,

“Isn’t that sound awful? It forced me to say, “Uff Da”.

“Oh! Yes”. You replied, taking a long breath.

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Touching the light across the shady and snowy road of T-juncture, exhaustedly releasing the smoggy breath, Sophia just said, “Uff Da! Oh, my back”. With this, the accelerometer was turned foggy with smog and the car was paced up ignoring the speed limit of 30 mph. She increased the heater in her car to make the wind screen clear. You were just heading up home after having 1-hour numbing experience to stand in a queue of people who were waiting for a picture with Santa in sixteen degrees below freezing. Before getting in the car, your toes were not getting sensed by your body until she suggested you borrow her belly. She told you to put your feet on her belly and held it there until your toes were warmed up and you felt your toes back. That was the strength of friendship that she justified. Since the cold feelings were no longer around you and both were warmed up, now she started feeling hungry for a while.

“I am starving”, she just said.

“Do you wanna try Chicken Biryani with Karachi Bombai Biryani Masala?”, you offered.

“You betcha!”, without any delay, she just strongly agreed to try your hand at making Biryani but to eat a little more than she used to eat. It made your evening another beautiful one.

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One day, you were feeling sick. Your nose was stuffy, throat was silly, and eyes were burning. Washing dishes after having American lamb and boiled rice in dinner together, you told her that you had flu. She moved four steps away in addition to two steps and said:

“You’ve flu, and you didn’t tell me. We’re having dinner together for the last week. Perhaps, I could be dead. My friends could be in trouble.”

You got scared and felt nervous: “What do you mean by dead?”

She superfluously bursts out: “Because flu is a very contagious disease. It can be spread into my friends. If you’ve told me earlier, perhaps I could be more conscious about the severity of your disease. You should limit yourself into your room and reduce your outdoor activities.”

Angering and caring were the words, perhaps, you were looking for to describe your affection for Sophia there. But you could hardly say a few words to argue that you do not have influenza or Omicron. Your explanations seemed illogical before her standoffish presence there.

With the rude face, Sophia went downstairs. The situation triggered an intense high mood swing inside you as you embarked on your four-day journey outside the home and without Sophia. With a text to your roommates, you left:

“Dear all, despite having flu shot, I started suffering from flu since yesterday. I have decided to move out to my friend’s place tomorrow morning after realizing that even flu is considered a very lethal disease here. I don’t want to put anyone in trouble. I will come back soon when I feel better. I hope you will appreciate my decision.”

Reading the text, Sophia regretted it and started feeling responsible for the whole chaos. You ignored her social awkwardness and left at night without responding her text:

“I feel awful that you’re leaving. That was never my intention. I didn’t mean to upset you.”

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Your four days were chaotic yet romantic episodes of your part of the USA stay. You scheduled an appointment on 8<sup>th</sup> December on the fourth day with a mental health therapist Claire Min. She was 24, Korean and enrolled in the 5th year of her degree program. You told everything to Claire fluently and highlighted the intense high and low mood swings that could describe your emotional condition precisely. In a while, you got an unusual smile while narrating your story to Claire. You knew it was Sophia’s message that sensed vibration in your right thigh. Now, you were no longer considering silence as burden to your mind with more tempestuous thoughts. Before you could finish your meeting with Claire, you picked your coat in the middle and left Claire’s office. You excitedly checked the new message. It was certainly from Sophia:

Sophia: “Hi, Daniel. I have a big news”.

You replied: “Really, please go ahead! Do tell me!”

Sophia: "My offer on a house just got accepted!"

That was a great news for her since she was getting her new house but was not the greatest for you because you knew that this would let her away from him. With an encouraging thought, you mustered up your courage to ask:

"So, will we be moving together. Undoing the nightmare, you had?"

She shared a nightmare a few days ago with you on breakfast that you called her and said, "I am done with you and will not move with you to the new house."

However, now you were excited to hear back from Sophia and then you heard:

"Haha! You can move in with me. The house needs a lot of work, mind you."

Following up, you got another text, "Where are you? I am gonna pick you up after work."

You felt intensely happy that boosted you up because these were the words, you ever wished from her to spend more time together.

You just replied to her that you will be back soon, and "we can meet at in the basement of Coffman at Starbucks on Washington Ave".

In time, they both reached in basement having hearts out of long breathes, excitement or exhaustion, but in either way, their sighs whispered "Uff Da" hugging and bringing their foreheads closer to each other.

## The Wizardly Flower

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"I first and last saw her in the garden", cried the student. His trembling voice like the rain that fell softly around him. The garden, once a blossoming beauty, now bore only a gravestone – a monument of love he had lost.

It was a chilly and rainy weather due to the first rain of the year. A student who was sitting in the garden, reading an old letter that was given to him by his grandfather. His grandfather had entrusted it to him with a solemn charge: "when you believe yourself wise enough, open this letter – but be prepared to bear its weight". The letter held a map – a map of a treasure hidden in distant mountains.

While the student was pondering, she appeared, a vision that was haunting him forever. Her presence was as sudden as the rain. Her eyes were blue as the sky after rain, her hair was shining as a waterfall of sunlit bronze and her lips were red as the rose's first bloom. The student fell in love with her with a little thought for the cost.

Their meeting became the first of many in the garden. They spoke of many dreams, fears and secrets in the evenings. When he shared the story of the map with her and mentioned the wizardly flower located in the midst of distant mountains with the ability to fulfil a single wish of a person, her eyes bloomed not with love but with a hunger for immortal beauty. On the contrary, the student dreamed of power and invulnerability. Each evening started passing with more tokens of loyalty, but each promise was as hollow as the empty branches of garden.

The two of them planned to find the treasure to have a good life. Their journey was full of perils in the dark forest. At the edge of a lake, they quarreled bitterly under the shadows in the forest. Their quarrel summoned a nightingale – a creature of love and sacrifice. Both explained their quest for treasure to preserve their love and requested the nightingale for assistance. The nightingale, with the devotion to help them, promised to guide them to the treasure. With the quest for eternal beauty and power hidden in both, they discovered through the map with the help of nightingale that the treasure was located under an oak tree in the mountains. He hoped to use the flower to become powerful, unstoppable and invulnerable, while the girl desired to use the flower for herself to become beautiful and young forever. Yet, they hid their true wishes from each other and promised to preserve their true love. At last, they reached the oak tree on the top of a dark mountain. The treasure lay beneath its roots, but the tree demanded a sacrifice: the blood of a pure heart. However, they both were unwilling to pay the price. Seeing this, as the nightingale was a bird of love and motherly care, she decided to offer her life, singing a mournful song as the tree's roots drained her lifeblood.

Instantly, the roots of the tree trembled and emerged and fell onto the chest of the nightingale, and the roots began to turn red with the nightingale's blood. While the nightingale lay dying, the student and the girl conspired in whisper their true intentions to use the treasure for their own desires.

Unbeknownst to them, a butterfly listened to their betrayal and shared the whole story with a venomous lizard, a friend of the nightingale. The pair, seeking revenge, decided to take revenge from the girl and the student. In the midst, the nightingale was sacrificing her life for their love, and the gates to the treasure were opening through the nightingale's blood. The lizard stuck his poisonous fangs into the girl's foot. She fell. Her body vaporized as the poison coursed through her veins. Desperately, the student clutched the wizardly flower and wished to save her life. The flower turned into ashes in his hands. The flower was unable to work on her lifeless body. Unfortunately, the single opportunity had been used. The student took the girl's body back to the garden where they had first met. His eyes were filled with tears

mingling with rain. Beneath the oak tree where their love had begun, he dug her grave, laid her body and whispered in her ears: "I first and last saw you in the garden".

## The Carnage

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I pressed the orange button, and everyone around me lost their memory. I took off my safety helmet, and I realised that our plan worked because the memory of everyone there except me was gone. Thanks to Dr. Zoyle, who had made us a memory-extinguisher device. In 2049, Dr. Zoyle, in his research on neurological impulses, created this device, and he said then, "I have made this device, and I hope this will help my country in this tough time." And now, in 2055, it has really helped against our enemy. Elbomia, which is located to the east of the Huntley Sea, has had a rivalry with Lapuda, which is to the southeast of the Huntley Sea. Now I was in the secret underwater research laboratory of Elbomia, situated on its northern coast. I, as a spy of Lapuda, was on a mission for its cypher security agency, I.C.E. (intelligence for countering evils), in the research lab named The Hutox, which was under the surveillance of Dr. Connor, who belonged to a dissident agency of Elbomia named E.A. (Evil for All). I successfully expunged their memories—of those who were working on a trenchant and pernicious project.

Going from my country, Lapuda, to the Hutox Lab in Elbomia was no less than an adventure. On April 26, 2055, I, in a giant submarine with a metallic colour and a 2X turbo accelerator in it, rushed into the northern coast of Elbomia, where now I had to go on my own with the help of MARK-11, the latest diving suit that had the ability to dive at 100 km/h. At 5 a.m., I reached there and stared at that onerous mission.

After pressing the red button on Dr. Zoyle's device, the workers and researchers in the span of 20 km lost their memory; they ran here and there like stray cattle. Now it was time to search the whole research unit to see what project was being worked on there. When I landed inside the laboratory, I saw a fountain-like radiator in the middle of which matte purplish radiation was coming out. The laboratory consisted of seven colossal compartments, and from the radiator, seven different metallic silver-coloured pipe-like energy carriers were given to these seven compartments so that they could get radioactive energy to work on the project that was against Lapuda. After seeing the purplish radiation from that radiator, I became curious about what was inside it and what kind of radioactive material was remitting energy to it. Reducing my eagerness, I opened the door and saw a glossy glass-like matte purplish sphere with some spikes on its outside. At that time, Mr. Honk's words hit me in the mind that a Pezaliyum orb from the Middle Kingdom of Egypt (1784 BC) had been stolen. This miraculous and mysterious glass-like sphere belonged to the Turin King Wegaf of Egypt. It is said that the King Wegaf of that time used this Pezaliyum orb for various purposes, using its powers to overthrow other thrones and destroy countries. This Pezaliyum Orb has the

characteristic that the power taken from it could be stored in any other thing, and then it could be used for the sake of the chaos of any country. When he died, this mysterious orb was buried with him in the Tomb of Hor. And then in 2052, it started circulating that the E.A. agency had stolen it from the Tomb of Hor, and now they are doing experiments on this radioactive material, Pezaliyum.

When I went further, I came to know that they were working on a project named SEVEN SECONDS STRATEGY (SSS) and I was very surprised to see this all. When I entered a compartment from those seven, there were piles of thin but tenacious sheets of Adamant metal in that compartment. In the other one, there are micromachines that are at least 2cm in size. In the fifth compartment, there were numerous mini-recording chips and innovative GPS locators. After looking at and considering all those things, it became clear that they were working on robotics. They were working on the ingenious tracking devices, and the best ever cameras were developing there. In a compartment, there was work going on, which was the most important phase of the project. Radioactive material (Pz-349) was used in the process of fission reaction being bombarded and placed into the robots, but seeing all this, I had no idea what kind of robots they were and what they would do.

Suddenly, a metallic crawling sound frightened me, and I quickly turned my head to check that sound. To my shock, it was a tailless ROBOT RAT with neon reddish eyes, and it didn't even have a right leg. Then I understood the bottom line of this case: they were making robot rats with the radioactive material Pezaliyum in them; they had efficient GPS, tracking devices, recorders, and cameras installed in them, and with the SEVEN SECONDS STRATEGY project, they were determined to blow up Lapuda by sending those robot rats into its pipelines. Elbomia and Lapuda are linked by both land and Huntley Sea, but it was very difficult for them to attack by land, so they built robot rats that were waterproof and would swim to Lapuda. They wanted to send them through Huntley Sea, which would go from waters to their underground pipelines that stretched across the country. It would have dismantled the whole Lapuda in just seven seconds.

Realising all this, I was stunned for a while as to what was going to happen to our country. Then, for the sake of checking all the compartments, I moved on to the seventh and last compartment, which had a different design. When I opened the big steel door, I saw a large human incubator lying in front of me, about the length and width of a human body. Now my curiosity grew as to what treacherous and dangerous work was going on here. A radioactive energy carrier was linked to the incubator. There was a timer set close to the incubator and displayed 19 HOURS 22 MINUTES 4 SECONDS LEFT...It seemed like it would take this 19-hour time to become something. Now all that remained was to find out what this thing was! The incubator was in an inclined position, and when I peeped through the front glass into the incubator, an influx of fear banged my nerves. It was Dr. Connor in the incubator for that extremely dangerous radioactive-human experiment. But a question was what he was doing with himself with these perilous and dangerous radioactive Pezaliyum rays. Then I found an experiment guide tablet (mobile), on which I came to know that

Dr. Connor wanted to become THE PEZALIOU—a Pezaliyum-rich human, full of isotopes of Pz-249. Once he became The Pezaliou, he could get the ability to sabotage and destroy kilometres of land with just a hand gesture and could melt several metres tall buildings in the form of lava. After this, I found an oxygen connection to that incubator. An idea came to my mind, and I cut the oxygen connection and the connection to the Pezaliyum radiator that I had already turned off. That's how I executed the supremo of this bloody game.

At last, I had an opportunity to bring back the memory of the workers and researchers working there whose memory I had eradicated with the memory extinguisher device. But keeping in mind that they would re-arrange this same bloody project against Lapuda and humanity, I decided to leave them as they are! And let them die with their empty minds. And while going back in the diving suit, I blew up the whole research laboratory, The Hutox, with a Harbinger Pulse Bomb, and their entire research and bloody project became a pile of ash. Thus, Dr. Connor was chastened for this dangerous strategy against humanity.

Now you are thinking about what happened with this Pezaliyum orb. When I reached the headquarters of I.C.E., Mr. Honk and all my comrades congratulated me on the completion of this arduous mission. My close teammate Adie told me, "I know you have that Pezaliyum Orb, and you want to hide it somewhere for always," and I, with the help of Adie, threw it in the far Southern Ocean of Leosor, with the intention that no one would ever find it. But if one finds it again, then DESTRUCTION IS INEVITABLE!

## Beauty

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Beauty exists for the sake of *beauty*. The world around us, is filled with pain, joy and suffering. Distorted blurs of nature and images of anguish and misery prevail. It was beautiful. All of it. Smoke dripped from the end of a glowing cigarette, alcohol twirled in a stained glass, eyes illuminated by neon signs hanging carelessly above bars – Killing us, destroying us, beating us down to nothing. We don't wonder with wide eyes and try to comprehend why the things that hate us appear to be so freaking beautiful. We just admire them. We admire the world, the thing that hates us the most! Nothing profound or intellectual is found within the world. It was merely to be admired, marveled at, and made to brew a storm of emotions deep within our conscious. We're meant to feel something. But what exactly? The only logical answer to that question is, who cares? Aestheticism was what mattered. Things looking pretty, words sounding beautiful, sentences that made no sense appearing to be the answer to all of humanity's problems. They never actually said anything, or meant anything. They were just words, and we were just people, trying to understand something impossible. That's what Emir believed. He found it fascinating that human feelings

and the world are interlinked and inseparable. Both are absurd and meaningless. Beautiful yet cruel. Our feelings don't actually care about us just as the world.

The world won't spare a glance at us, even when we're screaming, crying, thrashing around, begging to be seen, to be heard. The world won't stop for us, it won't wait for us. In the end, we're all alone. But Emir didn't want to be left all alone in this huge, desolated world. No, he won't accept this again! This is why he would do anything in his power to save his grandma. His only living relation. The only person in his life who mattered to him. The only person who ever listened to him. The only person who ever... loved him. He could not lose her, too. Or else, he would lose himself.

This is why he would fight the world, his feelings, and even the demons living inside his head....to save his precious grandma. "Emir!" A loud voice called out to him from behind. He stepped down from the railings of the rooftop, and turned around to look at the voice. It was Jamie, his friend.

"What're you doing up there? Were you planning to jump down? Are you in your right state of mind?" He continued shouting without any pause.

"Are you stupid! I was not going to jump." Emir sighed as he looked back to stare at the night sky.

"So, what were you even doing up there, standing at the edge of the roof, one...", he paused and released the breath he didn't know he was holding, "one step away from falling off and... and you do realize it's the eleventh floor, right?" Jamie sounded scared, his brows furrowed, a deep scowl on his face and... wait... why his hands were trembling?

Why? Why was he scared? What was he even scared of? I wasn't going to jump down, I wasn't... w-was I? Emir's brain was whirling with these questions.

"I... I was just... breathing in the fresh air. It was suffocating in the room." He stuttered, thinking about his grandma's condition.

His grandma was battling cancer, all alone in that hospital room. The room smelt of medicines and antiseptics with undertones of artificial fragrance contained in cleaners. It all made Emir nauseous and suffocated.

However, it was not the only thing that was suffocating Emir. The sudden worsened condition of his grandma, the soft beep of monitors and increasing hum of machines turning into an eerie symphony of warning signals, a reminder of the fragility of life. How funny it is that life, which seems vast and infinite, can shatter like a piece of delicate glass with the gentlest touch of fate. Just like that. Gone, vanished, the end.

Suddenly, the room felt smaller and smaller, the air felt heavier as he watched the doctors rushing in, working quickly and trying to stabilize his grandma, a few hours ago. Emir had to leave; it was too much

for him to witness at once. So, he bolted out of the room, hurried past closed doors and patient-filled rooms as the hallway was brightly lit with the hospital's fluorescent lights.

His footsteps echoed loudly in the quiet corridor, a frantic rhythm that seemed to match the pounding of his heart. Finally, he burst through a metal door that led to the staircase, his destination to breathe again.

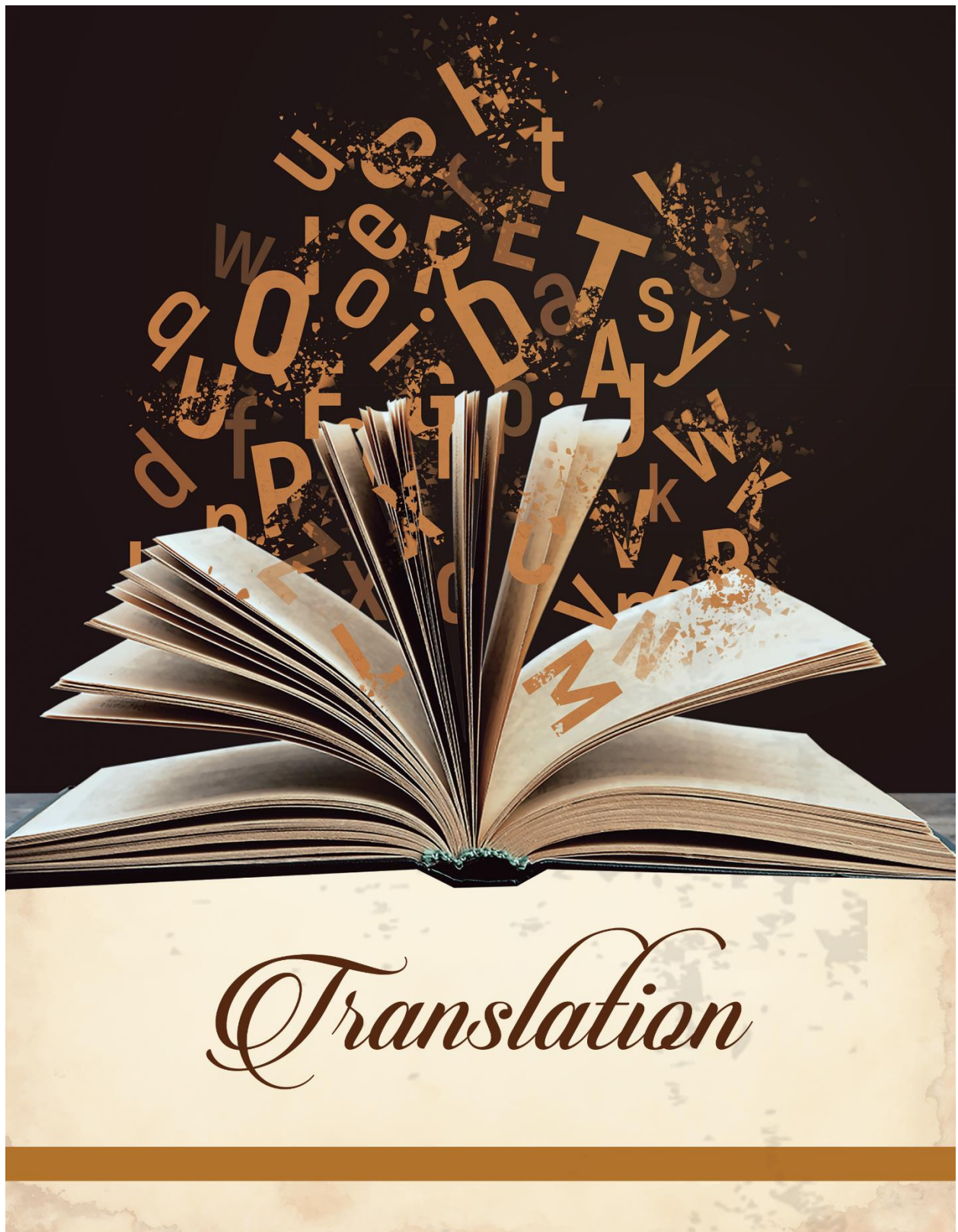
And this was how he found himself on the edge of the roof, breathing heavily, his hands gripping the metal railing tightly as he gazed out into the dark night sky. As dark as his life.

In the distance, he could hear the sound of the city, a low hum that seems to reverberate through the air. The wind whipped around him, sending his hair in all directions.

As he had stood there, catching his breath, he could feel his heart rate slowing down. The fear and terror had been replaced by a sense of peace and calm as he looked down at the busy roads. All the vehicles and the people looked so small, so harmless. The air wasn't suffocating him here. He felt at peace. He smiled and let the wind hit his face as he stood straight with his arms stretched out.

For a moment, he felt simply present, taking in the beauty of the night sky and the stillness of the rooftop. It was a moment of clarity, a brief rest from the chaos of the world below. The night didn't look as dark, and haunting as before. In fact, it looked calm and inviting. As if the night was calling out his name, probably to soothe his pain.

He felt... alive, standing at the top of the railings. How did he get up there? He himself didn't know. But what he knew for sure was that, for once, the world beneath him looked alluring. Beautiful. As if it exists solely for this sake. As if beauty... exists for the sake of beauty.



## An Apple A Day

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*President, Progressive Writers Association, Lahore*

I take immense pleasure in eating apples. How many different kinds and qualities of apples I buy daily; cut them with care and eat them by arranging them on a plate. But every time I think that I ate willy-nilly...I did not enjoy it. Had I not eaten them, what would have mattered? Then I remember her. A girl studying with me in college whose name has been erased from my memory.

Round face, healthy body, hair cut in fashionable style, wearing a *kurta* and tight pajamas I never forgot that cheerful, full of life girl. One could guess from her face and personality that she belongs to some wealthy family. A few of my friends and I were middle-class girls, where parents met our fees and expenses with great difficulty.

During break-time in college, we would collect our respective money and get one or two plates of *chaat* from Siddiq the *chaat*-seller and eat together.

She bought samosas from the cafeteria with Coke. Then taking out beautiful, fragrant, tasty and juicy apples from her bag, she would insert her teeth in them. We would also sometimes hear her say 'An apple a day keeps the doctor away'.

Since then, I fell in love with apples. Perhaps for this reason, too, apples or other expensive fruits were brought less into our home. Sometimes guavas, mangoes or melons were brought so my brother, and sisters would immediately finish them, eating like gluttons. My wish to eat apples has very much remained unfulfilled. There appeared to be a big class difference between her and me. I used to travel by a public bus, and she alighted from a car with a uniformed driver and entered the college walking grandly. However, I was much better than her in studies, and got better marks than her.

Sitting on the chairs in the cafeteria, my friends and I would often keep our eyes fixed upon the Coke and pieces of samosas left by the rich girls. As soon as they would set up to leave, we used to run to their tables, eat the leftovers and would start guffawing. When she ate the apples, swinging her beautiful blooming fashionably-cut hair, I would feel very jealous of her. I muttered silently. 'To hell with her! She looks so carefree but nice eating apples.'

Then college time ended. Even at the university, time passed quietly after completion of my studies. All of us settled down into our respective homes.

I forgot everything but I always remembered my longing to eat fine juicy apples. Many times, I brought the best apples but did not derive any special pleasure from them. Their taste was not like what I

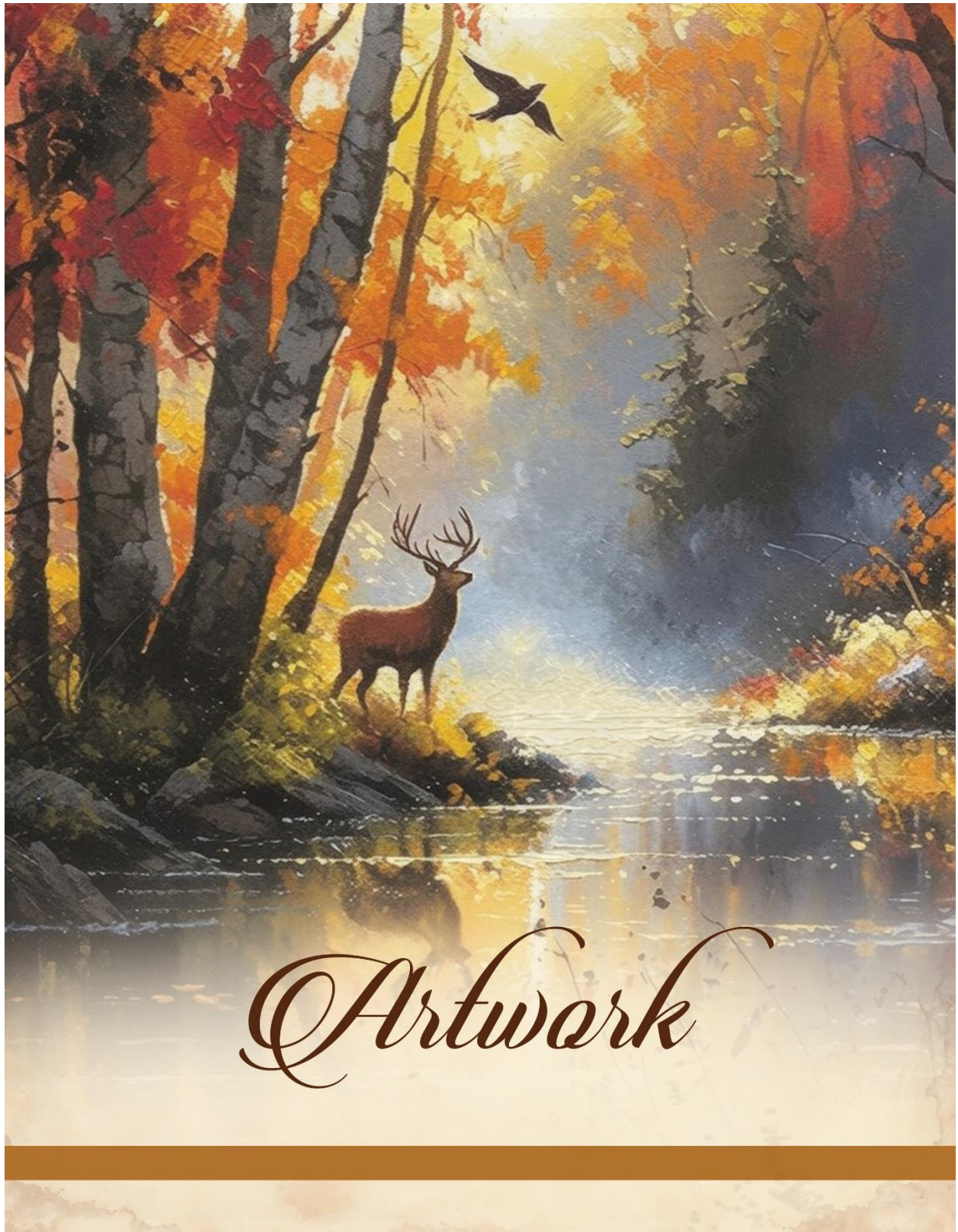
had thought. I never forgot that girl, although I should have forgotten her. Many decades passed but her thoughts remained stuck in my mind. To hell with her! She lost her life, at an exceedingly early age, due to cancer in the last year of college. How many doctors must have crowded around her before her death...although she ate so many apples.

### **Mirza Asadullah Khan Ghalib's "O, innocent heart! What has stricken you?"**

*Translator: Mah-e-Nao*

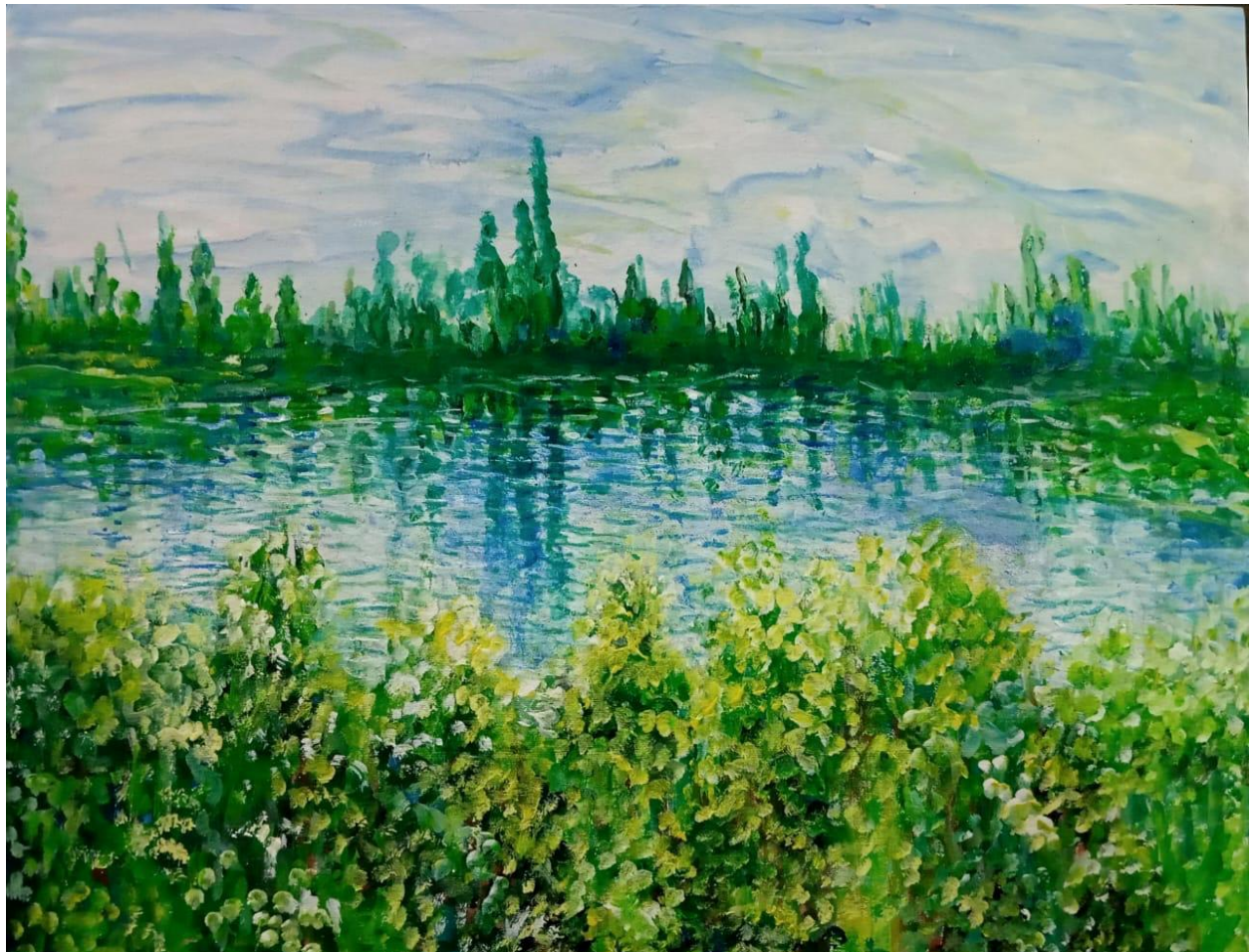
*Author: Mirza Asadullah Khan Ghalib  
Lecturer, Department of English and Literary Studies  
University of Management and Technology, Lahore*

O, innocent heart! What has stricken you?  
Where healing remains an enigma to affliction  
I long for them, yet they flinch from me  
O creator, what does destiny behold for us?  
I have a gift of gab to speak volumes and express  
But I wish you inquire what burns me inside  
There is no one, but you  
What stirs the chaos in the world then?  
The heavenly faces are incomprehensible  
What riddles stash in the charms and winks?  
Why their curled tresses rebel against the order?  
Why their smoky gaze pricks my heart?  
From where do these fresh daisies originate?  
What standard do these clouds and wind hold?  
Wanting the garden to be taken care of,  
From someone who is not even a gardener  
I submit my life to you, O beloved  
Though unknown to rituals of allegiance  
I accept I am worth nothing, but  
Off the cuff fortune hurts no one!



## Inspiration: Claude Monet's Flowers on the Banks of Seine near Vétheuil

*Neha Azhar*  
*BS English Literature, Session: 2020-2024*  
*University of Management and Technology, Lahore*



## Inspiration: Henri Matisse's Harmony in Red

*Muhammad Bin Abbas  
BS English Literature, Session: 2020-2024  
University of Management and Technology, Lahore*



## Inspiration: Charles Courtney Curran's May Morning

*Laiba Tahir*  
*BS English Literature, Session: 2020-2024*  
*University of Management and Technology, Lahore*



## Nocturnal Solitude

*Laiba Amjad*

*BS English Literature, Session: 2020-2024  
University of Management and Technology, Lahore*



## Springtime Serenade

*Fizzah Kafeel*

*BS English Literature, Session: 2020-2024  
University of Management and Technology, Lahore*



## Inspiration: Paul Klee's Senecio

Aqsa Kousar  
BS English Literature, Session: 2020-2024  
University of Management and Technology, Lahore



## Inspiration: Claude Monet's White Water Lilies

*Aleena Haider*  
*BS English Literature, Session: 2020-2024*  
*University of Management and Technology, Lahore*



## A Symphony of Broken Light

*Muhammad Hammad Ali*  
*BS English Literature, Session: 2020-2024*  
*University of Management and Technology, Lahore*



## Inspiration: Ronell Ganz's Be Still Painting

*Arooj Gull*

*BS Graphic Design, Session: 2021-2025*

*University of Management and Technology, Lahore*



## Inspiration: Anshul Kush Dixit's The Couple and the Bonfire

*Laiba Fatima*  
*BS Graphic Design, Session: 2021-2025*  
*University of Management and Technology, Lahore*



## About “The Literary Fulcrum”

The Literary Fulcrum (TLF) is the annual literary magazine of the Department of English and Literary Studies (DELS) which caters to the following genres of literary and creative writings:

- Poetry      • Play
- Short Story • Travelogue
- Translation • Memoir
- Artwork    • Non-Fiction Prose

**Submissions are open for 5th Issue of TLF (2025) – Deadline: 30th June 2025**

### Submission Guidelines

Authors are required to send submissions by following the given guidelines:

1. Manuscripts must be in English with a special focus on grammar and vocabulary. All non-English words should be italicized. TLF only accommodates unpublished and original work; however, rare pieces are entertained with the permission of the author and the first publisher. All submissions are checked for similarity and AI content.
2. Essays, Travelogues (1st person/3rd Person), Non-Fiction Prose, and Argumentative Writings should contain a logical sequence of writing, e.g. Introduction, Middle, and Conclusion.
3. The authors are encouraged to make abundant, yet discrete use of literary devices, especially in fictional pieces, to enhance the aesthetic quality of their work.
4. All submissions (apart from poems) must be of a reasonable length. The preferred word limit of prose works is 1000-1500.
5. The authors must clearly mention their affiliation: name, designation (in case of faculty or staff), batch, and program of study on the manuscript.
6. Authors are requested to send not more than TWO manuscripts for review for each issue.
7. Authors are also requested to give a brief overall synopsis/summary of what the manuscript is about in the submission form. The authors can identify major themes, ideas, motifs, symbolism, and/or other literary devices.

**AUTHORS MUST SEND THEIR SUBMISSION**

**OR SCAN:**

**AT THE FOLLOWING LINK:**

[www.bit.ly/tlfsubmission](http://www.bit.ly/tlfsubmission)



### Review Process

The reviewing process will be completed within four weeks and the authors will receive the editors' decision thereafter in the fifth week from the date of their submission. It is advised that the manuscript be thoroughly proofread before submission to avoid any inconvenience.

# Patron's Message

The Literary Fulcrum continues to be a beacon of artistic ingenuity and intellectual exploration. This issue unfolds like a tapestry of inspiration, weaving together a diverse collection of voices captivating poetry, poignant prose, and perceptive critical analyses that delve into the human experience. I believe that the magazine will go a long way in evoking a love for literature and all that it upholds!

**Prof Dr Asif Raza**

Rector, University of Management and Technology, Lahore

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