

ISSUE I



DAREECHA

From the Editor, Rubab Aamir

Choosing the theme of a window for our first issue seemed to me the perfect choice. Our goal as a magazine is to provide a platform to South Asian writers, but the true purpose of any magazine is to shed light on the stories hidden behind every room, every doorway, and every curtain. As a student of literature, I have come to know that every text is a window to the soul, to the sociopolitical climate, to the writer's psychology, and perhaps even to that of the reader. The concept of looking through, looking beyond has existed for ages and human beings as a species have always tried to convert the most mundane objects into a lens that allows them to look into another world.

Perhaps it would be far too philosophical for me to say that the entire purpose of our existence is to look through and to peer beyond. The whole of life becomes an act of searching for a way to get through and to grasp what is forbidden, the whole of life a reenactment of the Fall.

From the English Sub-editor, Hania Afridi

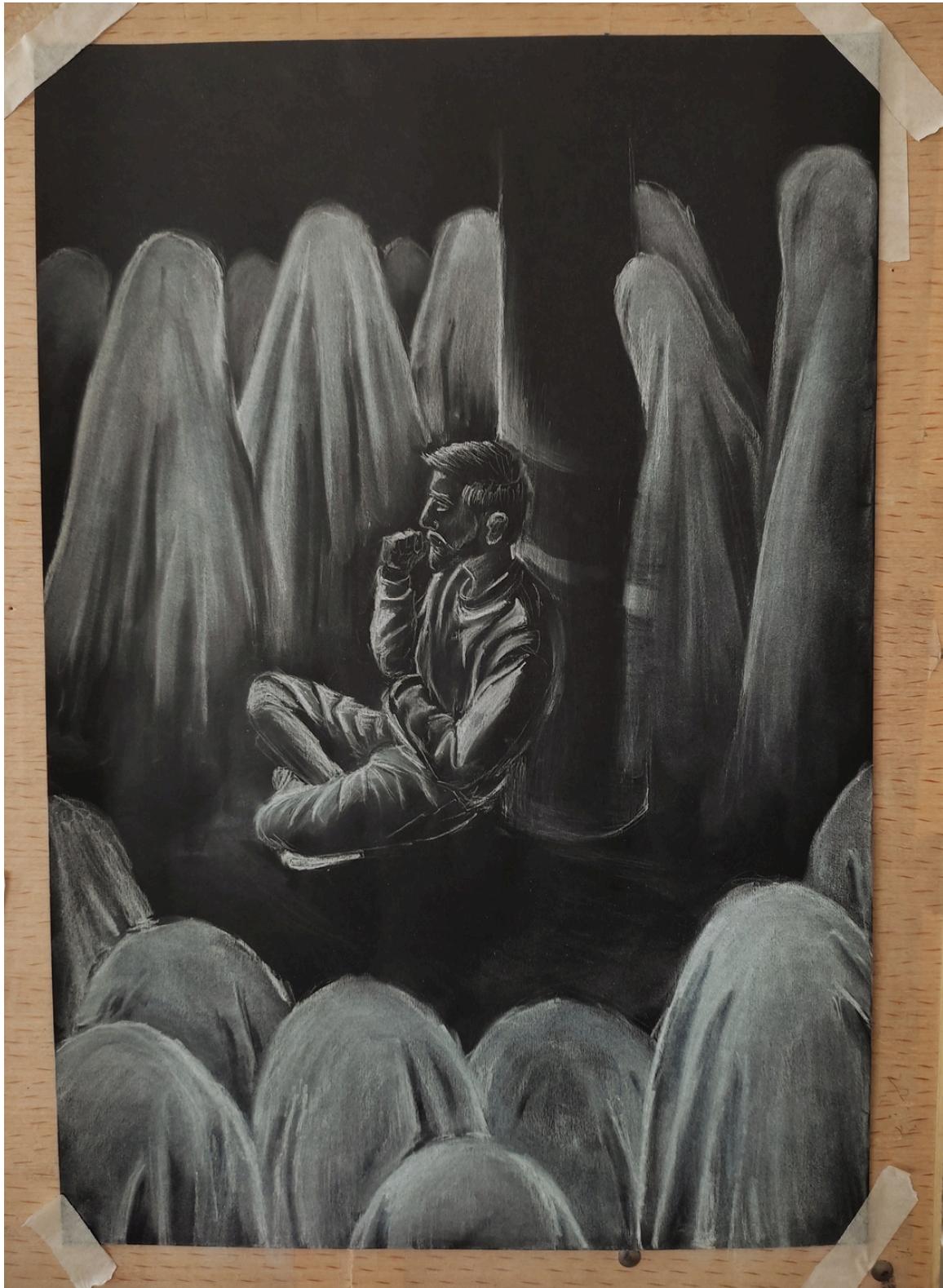
A window often symbolizes a threshold between two worlds: the interior and the exterior, the known and the unknown, the reality and the illusion, the finite and the infinite, the past and the future, the light and the dark, the silence and the quiet. To me, a window, in its physical form, is a mundane yet profound object that offers a glimpse into the innermost longings of the observer. As we gaze through its transparent surface, we are not merely looking at the outside world- we are projecting our own self onto the scene before us. A window, therefore, serves as a timeless emblem for writers, poets, and artists worldwide. In this issue, the writers have used this concept masterfully to depict a scene or to convey abstract ideas, inviting the readers to contemplate the meanings hidden within each verse

From the Urdu Sub-editor, Sudais Rafiq

زاویے کی بحث میں جو خصوصاً اگر ادب و فن کے دائروں میں ہوتا دریچہ ایک اہم موضوع ہے۔ یہ دریچہ ہے جو زاویے کے قریب کا معنی رکھتی ہے یا یہ بحث ہوئی نہیں اگر میں کہوں کے دریچہ زاویے ہی ہے۔ دریچہ حقیقت کا منظر ہے کبھی تو اکثر حقیقت کی وضاحت۔ کسی کے مکان کا کوئی دریچہ تو کسی کا کوئی۔ انسان جس پر اگر عقل کا اثر ملے کسی دریچہ کے روبارو کبھی کچھ سوال میں الجھے نا، یہ ممکن نہیں۔ میری باری دریچہ ایک فرق کے قیام کی وجہ بنی۔ جو اُس پار کی زندگی، آزادی، خوبصورتی کا منظر واضح کرتا میری اذیت میں اضافے کا سبب بنی۔



Aliyan Tahir



Ushna Siddique



Whose Juliet?

Joseph stands in the middle of the stage, a piece of already creased parchment clutched ever so mercilessly in his hands. He nervously opens his mouth, reads out a couple of words from the butchered script, shakes his head in dissatisfaction and starts doing it all over again.

A staircase on the stage leads to a balcony and a concealed chamber. The staircase is designed with a discreet section that is hidden from the audience. This arrangement allows Joseph to transition into Wilson and vice versa during the memory scenes as needed.

Mary, who ironically looks nothing like Juliet, sits at the foot of the stairs, smoking a cigarette. Clearly bored and impatient, she starts humming.

Joseph: Mary, please! I am trying to get into the scene!

Mary: Might as well quit, you know. At this rate, you're not getting anywhere anyway.

Wilson, appearing on the platform from behind the curtains, leans on the railing, a smirk playing across his lips.

Wilson: I've always liked Mary. Come to think of it, I've more in common with her than you.

Joseph: She is my sister!

Mary: Hence the honesty, little brother. Sometimes it's okay to admit you don't have it in you and move on.

Wilson: (*lighting his cigarette*) So I keep telling him, sweet Mary. So I keep telling him.

Joseph: I will kill you!

(*Mary and Wilson laughing at the same time*)

Mary & Wilson: (*in a condescending manner*) Joseph. Joseph. Joseph.

Joseph: Are you here to help or belittle me?

Mary & Wilson: Belittle you.

Joseph: (*ignoring Wilson*) Mary, please.





Mary: (*rolling her eyes*) Fine.

Joseph: Thank you.

(Joseph starts trying different variations again)

Mary: (*losing it*) Just get into the goddamn scene, Joseph!

Wilson: Just get into the goddamn scene, Joseph!

Joseph: (*throwing the script in the air*) Fine!

Mary: Well?

Wilson: Well?

Joseph: (*beseechingly*) Go stand on the balcony. You're supposed to be Juliet!

Mary: You're the one who needs practice, not me.

Joseph: Please. I need you to be in the scene.

Mary: Fine!

(*Mary storms up the stairs, coming to stand beside Wilson. She leans against the railing, one hand cradling her cheek, while her gaze drifts into the distance.*

Lights focus on Joseph and Wilson. Mary, while in her pose, becomes almost out of focus. There is a tinge of blue to hint a shift in mood

Wilson: Come on, Joseph. There is honor in surrender.

Joseph: This is my last chance.

Wilson: (*walking down the stairway*) Oh, Joseph. For you, there were no chances to begin with.

Joseph: 'It is the east, and Juliet is the sun.'





Wilson: So you couldn't bear to behold her in all her glory. She would have seared your eyes.

Joseph: 'Arise, fair sun, and kill the envious moon,
Who is already sick and pale with grief,'

Wilson: She did, didn't she? You were a sad sickle in the somber silent sky. You needed the dark to fathom your own light. She – oh, she was the eclipse that reduced everything to a murky mirage. Even you.

Joseph: (*In a feeble voice*) 'I am too bold, 'tis not to me she speaks:
Two of the fairest stars in all the heaven,'

Wilson: What are you doing, Joseph? Shakespeare must be turning in his grave.

(*Wilson gets into position and starts doing the monologue flawlessly. The moment he takes the stage, there is a subtle shift in Mary's demeanor, a glint of pride, which is strange since she cannot see or hear him*)

'Her vestal livery is but sick and green
And none but fools do wear it; cast it off.
It is my lady, O, it is my love!
O, that she knew she were!
She speaks yet she says nothing: what of that?
Her eye discourses; I will answer it.'

Joseph: (*now flawless*) 'I am too bold, 'tis not to me she speaks:
Two of the fairest stars in all the heaven,'

Wilson: There you go!

Joseph: 'Having some business, do entreat her eyes
To twinkle in their spheres till they return.'

Wilson: Beautiful!

Joseph: 'What if her eyes were there, they in her head?
The brightness of her cheek would shame those stars,'





Wilson: Come to think of it. It shamed you, didn't it? That's why you left your fingerprints on those cheeks.

Joseph: (*voice teetering*) 'As daylight doth a lamp; her eyes in heaven'

Wilson: Oh, how blank they were that day, her eyes. Two bottomless, black pits.

Joseph: (*voice breaking*) 'Would through the airy region stream so bright'

Wilson: You can do it, can't you Joseph? You're a good actor. One of the best. Come on.

Joseph: (*crying*) 'That birds would sing and think it were not night.'

Mary: (*walking down the stairs*) Give it a rest, Joseph.

Joseph: (*wiping his eyes*) No, no. I got it. I was almost there. You saw me. I felt it. For the first time in ages. The theater in my veins.

Mary: (*pitifully*) Yes. You were almost there, Joseph.

Joseph: Mary, please. I have to do this.

Mary: (*putting on her coat and hat*) We'll give it another shot tomorrow.

(*Walks towards the door, opens it. Halts for a moment, turns around*)

Mary: Go out into the sun, little brother. The shadows have been eating you alive.

Wilson: Damn you, Joseph! Now she is gone and I am stuck with you again.

(*A young lady, dressed as a female cupid, quietly slips into the room and positions herself in a corner, purposefully avoiding notice as she eavesdrops on the one-sided conversation*)

Joseph: No, damn you for destroying everything in my life! I should have... I should have...

Wilson: Should have?





(Joseph stammers for words. Unable to articulate his thoughts, he seizes whatever is at hand and hurls it toward Wilson, who skillfully transforms each assault into a choreographed display)

Joseph: You are the bane of my existence!

Wilson: Or perhaps you are mine. Oh, look! We have a visitor!

Joseph: (*turning around*) What business brings you here? Wait, are you here to audition for my play? I didn't even put up any announcements! (*turning to Wilson*) See? I told you the world has been waiting for me!

Cupid: Umm, actually I am here to make an announcement, sir.

Wilson: (*dramatically*) So radiant and so ravishing in your attire! What glad tidings, what respite from this murderous mundanity do you come bearing? Speak, if you can; what are you?

(*Drumming offstage*)

(*Cupid steps forward, offering a silver plate shrouded in a red cloth. Joseph lifts the drape to find an extravagantly adorned letter. With a motion that suggests anything but excitement, he reluctantly takes the invitation*)

Joseph: How preposterous! When did theaters begin resorting to cheap clowns for their publicity?

Cupid: Cheap clown? I am very clearly the goddess of love!

Wilson: That's taking a little too far but I admire her confidence.

Joseph: The god of love is Cupid and he is supposed to be a boy.

Cupid: Now that's where you are not quite right, sir! In classical mythology, Cupid indeed has a female counterpart and she is called Psyche. Although, my employer would not hear of it. He said I could call myself whatever I wanted but the public would see my character as a feminist spin on the classical image of Cupid and that's all he really cared about. If you ask me, he is a prick. Not really in it for the art. It doesn't matter though, does it? His methods, no matter how divorced from the true essence of art, manage to pull in the crowds. Sadly, that's what's become of theater these days. A superficial culmination of gimmicks to keep the surface level audience on the edge of their seats.





Wilson: Whooa! She is either stupid, which I do not think is the case, or insufferably meddlesome!

Cupid: You were in it for the art, weren't you?

Wilson: Or maybe just delusional, like you.

Joseph: (*ignoring both*)

'Dear all those who were once afflicted by the fever of the stage and could never recover,
You are cordially invited to witness history in the making at 8:00 p.m. sharp at The Maplewood
Playhouse. Our latest rendition of the timeless love story, Romeo & Juliet, awaits, and we warmly
extend an invitation for you to grace us with your presence.'

Yours sincerely,

The Mask

(*Wilson starts laughing*)

Wilson: So much for feeling the theater in your veins!

Joseph: It stars her.

Wilson: Faith? Wasn't that a given?

Joseph: Mary.

Wilson: Really? Show me! (*Reading over Joseph's shoulder*) 'Starring Mary Moore as Rosaline.'

(*Laughs*)

Cupid: Sir?

Wilson: Do my eyes fool me or is the delusional dove blushing? I think you might have to reschedule
your midnight self-pity session, Joseph!

Cupid: If you don't mind me asking, who are you talking to?

(*Joseph remains silent*)

Wilson: Oh, no – she can't think you're crazy. Tell her you talk to yourself. It's an insufferable habit.

Joseph: Why should I? She might be young but her features are not pleasing at all.

Cupid: Sir!

Wilson: And this breed calls itself 'gentle'!

Cupid: Perhaps they are right. Maybe you are a demon in the shape of a human.

Joseph: (*slowly and threateningly*) Oh, did you doubt it? Did you not know I sprout horns when the
moon is full and grow canines in the cover of the night? Did you not know I have not left this place
in a goddamn decade? Now why would a breed that calls itself 'gentle' ostracize itself from good
society? Perhaps because it is not gentle at all! Perhaps because the shadows are the only thing that
stand between it and the blood of an ugly hag like you!

Cupid: Oh, by god, he is a madman!



Joseph: (*throwing things at her*) Leave, then! Leave before I unleash the demon on you! Leave!
(The girl stares at him in shock for a few seconds before sprinting out the door)
Wilson: Damn you, Joseph! Must you turn away every person kind enough to walk through those doors? Must you forever condemn me to your woebegone theater of ghosts?

Joseph: And what would you be beyond my woebegone theater of ghosts, Wilson?

Wilson: Have you ever thought for a moment, Joseph, that maybe, just maybe, it is you who is the ghost and not me?

Joseph: I had a life. I remember every bit of it.

Wilson: Not as well as me.

(He transitions between positions, delivering monologues from characters Joseph portrayed during his stardom)

Wilson: This was your life, wasn't it? Do you remember it as well as I do?

(Joseph remains silent)

Show me! Come on!

(Joseph stays silent)

How about we do a scene from the life you have been hiding from all these years? Pain is what makes an artist, isn't it? I can do your Faith. Should be easy enough. What did she do when you wrapped those fingers around her dainty little throat and suspended her from that balcony? Choke and thrash in your arms. Yeah, I think...

(Joseph throws himself at Wilson and the two fight. Wilson, as might be expected, is marvelous and Joseph soon finds himself sprawled across the floor, gasping for breath. Wilson laughs)

Wilson: (*lightening a cigarette*) Oh, Joseph! Don't tell me that's how you make love!

(Joseph remains silent)



Shit! You've never made love, have you?

(Starts laughing)

Oh, Joseph!

Joseph: She never wanted it. She was...

Wilson: A nun?

Joseph: She was a Christian woman!

Wilson: Really? Why did she sleep with me then?

Joseph: She didn't!

Wilson: Let me show you, Joseph. Let me take you down my memory lane.

The lighting subtly dims, casting a partial blue hue. A masked girl descends the stairs from the room above, clad in a flowing white gown, and Joseph starts singing 'Christian Woman' by Type O Negative. The girl looks at Wilson for a couple of moments, breathing heavily, before succumbing to the very obvious surge of passion coursing through her. Wilson roughly turns the girl around and, looking at Joseph, rips off her pristine white gown, revealing a red corset underneath – a symbol of female sexuality under the facade of innocence. Joseph imitates Wilson from where he stands as if he can feel all that he does.

The girl turns around, takes Wilson's hand in hers, and leads him to the chamber upstairs. Joseph follows but halts just outside the room, looking through the chinks in the curtains. The audience cannot see Wilson and the masked girl anymore but they can still observe Joseph as he, in an obvious imitation of Wilson, makes love to thin air and ends the scene by pushing his imaginary partner on her hands and knees.

Scene Ends.

BY: Sawera Dedar

(This is a snippet from a larger play, it is not the entire text.)



**DIAFOTIZO ILLUMINATE
BY
RUBAB AAMIR**

He nurses the warm coffee in his hands.

“If we went on a trip and I got stranded on an island, how long would you wait for me?”

He had been trailing his lips from her ears to her hair when the question came. In his distracted state, he didn’t give it much thought. “Forever,” he mumbled, breathing in the smell of her lemon-scented shampoo. “I’d wait forever.”

He jerked back in surprise when her elbow found its way between his ribs, a cough rising up in his throat abruptly. She wasn’t looking at him though, instead choosing to scowl at the plate of finished eggs. “Don’t lie to me, at least respect me enough to be honest.”

He stared at her for a few beats, his heartbeat steadily speeding up from anxiety. “I am - I mean, I am being honest but don’t you think the question is a little . . .”

“A little what?” She snapped. He deflated, the question dying out in his throat. These little moments had been growing increasingly in frequency, yet he still did not know how to handle them.

He opened his mouth, getting ready to soothe her, to tell her he’d wait for her for an eternity, til the day he died and then some more but she beat him to it.

“I just don’t understand why you have to lie to me about everything! You’d wait forever for me? Forever? You can’t even wait for me to go to the bathroom before you start making eyes at the waitress.”

“Babe, I was asking for the bill! I have to look at her for that.”

She snorted, shoving herself off the chair and walking past him. He slowly followed, unsure of himself.

“Well, I wouldn’t be surprised if you resorted to cheating. The apple, the tree and all that.”

He stilled in surprise, his heart lurching towards his throat. She continued as she began to pick up the scattered clothes on the couch. “Your mom would have killed herself for your father, well she did kill herself, actually and what did he give her for it? Walking down the aisle with his neighbour two years later. What a joke.”





The sunlight coming in through the window lit up the steam from his mug, lighting up each dust particle surrounding him. He gently raised the pad of his fingers to catch one, witnessing it disappear as soon as it made contact.

His eyes fell on the seat next to him where he could almost make up the shape of her, where she rested her cracked hands, where she placed her socked feet. He rested his cheek on the counter and let his eyes slip shut. Through his barely open gaze, he saw the dust arrange itself to form the shape of her.

When he moved, hours had passed. There was an incoming call on his phone, the word “Dad” blinking at him innocently. Rubbing his eyes, he brought the cold device to his ear.

“Where have you been?” were the first words out of his father’s mouth. “You haven’t even called once in the past two months.”

“I’ve just been busy. I’m sorry.”

“Busy with what? Your lack of job, your lack of any hobbies, your lack of - “ his father paused, his raspy voice coming to an abrupt halt.

He swallowed deeply, clearing his throat. “I just need some time to think about stuff.”

Silence.

Then: “This isn’t the time for you to be left alone. Ever since she . . . thinking is the worst thing you can do right now.”

He smiled to himself, ruffling his hair with a sigh. “Alright, Dad.”

“Come over for dinner tomorrow night?”

“Okay.”

“I . . . ”

He waited. A lone branch knocked against the window as the sunlight began to shy away, the clouds laying siege to the previously blue sky.

“See you tomorrow.”





They had been in the car, driving back from her high school reunion. There had been some awkward moments for him because he hadn't known anyone but he had still managed to enjoy himself. Although, he wasn't sure if the same went for her. She had been strangely silent ever since they had left.

He searched for something to say. "Aaron seemed really funny, by the way. I could not stop laughing at the carnival story."

Silence.

"I can't believe the wild stuff you got up to when you were young."

Silence.

"I used to be so closed off, you couldn't pay me to put down - "

"Can you seriously not take a hint?" she snapped, slamming her hand down on the dashboard. His knuckles grew white on the steering wheel. "'When I was young' what? Because I'm such a grandma now? I feel so sorry for you, it must be so disgusting to be with someone so old."

The inside of his cheek made its way between his teeth. Yes, there was a considerable age difference between them. He had been 19 when she was in her early 30s but that hadn't mattered to him, it had never mattered to him.

"Are you upset because of the jokes your friends made?"

"Of course, I'm fucking upset because of it! And they are not my 'friends'! They made me seem like some sort of cougar."

He frowned, he hadn't realized it at the time. There had been several jokes surrounding the topic but it seemed like they had been made in good humor. Although, he knew it was a sensitive topic for her.

"We aren't even that far apart, I think it's because I just have a baby face."

She laughed in response, turning to look out the window. He glanced at her and couldn't help thinking about how beautiful she looked, the way the streetlights illuminated her dark hair.

"Being fat doesn't mean you have a 'baby face'." she muttered.



His gaze snapped back to the road instantly, the bread rolls he had consumed at dinner leaping upwards. His jaw shook as he spoke: "That was cruel. I don't get why you always attack me this way."

Her head snapped back towards him, surprised. He usually didn't confront her about the comments she made, consoling himself with the thought that it was just another episode.

"It's not a fucking attack if I'm being honest," she spat.

"But . . . it's not just that, you've been getting angry more and more often these days."

He could feel her rage building up with every answer he gave, and his hands began to shake on the wheel. "Must be the fucking menopause, since that's how old you think I am anyways."

"I have never said you're old!"

"But you've thought it! I see it in your gaze, I see it in other people's gazes."

He gathered in a deep breath, trying to calm himself down. "I've only ever looked at you with love, I don't understand why you don't . . ." His voice cracked, his throat closing up with the arrival of tears.

She pulled at her hair in exasperation, the strands coming undone. Lovely. "Why can't we have a single fucking conversation without you getting emotional?"

"I'm not emotional!"

"Yes, you are. Look at yourself! I can't say anything to you because of your oh-so-fragile 'mental health'. In case you end up just like your mother."

The tears were carving a salty path down his cheeks but there was anger now too. "Why do you have to bring her up every single time? Do you think my mother's suicide was a joke?"

He could feel the energy coming off of her, uncontrollable now, she was feeding off of his anger. "No, but it sure does make me wonder when it'll be your turn. I turn my head away for a second and I see that look descend on your face, like you're looking for the perfect opportunity to grab a blade and go for it."

She continued eagerly, moving to the edge of her seat. "I don't even understand why you need to go to a therapist. What's so bad about your life? What's so bad about having everything?"



He was choking down on his sobs, the windshield unclear in front of his eyes. "You don't - you 'why - "

"Tell you what?" Her breathing had grown heavy, her entire body turned towards him with anticipation. Fear began to bleed into his veins. "You want to die don't you?"

"What? No - no - I -"

She lurched forward, grabbing onto the steering wheel, his face inches from hers. So beautiful. "Then let's die together."

With his eyes so full of tears, he couldn't even see when the car veered off the road. He only felt it when it crashed into another, and he felt it when it landed upside down in the trees. And he felt it when he reached over to her and felt the ice radiating off her face.

"And so, what have you been up to?"

He snapped back into his senses and blinked at Dr. Jean, at the wrinkles on her face, her sleek hair, and the sternness of her eyes. He cleared his throat, shaking his head. "Not a lot, if I'm being honest. I just lay on the couch and think about . . . stuff. My dad told me it's not good to think too much though."

Dr. Jean smiled at him. "As someone who has stifled his thoughts and his true feelings for so long, I think it's good for you to sit with your feelings. Explore your life from a new lens."

He laughed soundlessly, rubbing the side of his cheek. "I don't think that new lens is a good thing, though. Because it makes me look . . . differently at certain people in my life."

"People like your wife?"

The smile slowly faded from his face. Dr. Jean observed him for a moment before continuing. "Sometimes it's hard to come to terms with the fact that a relationship you saw as one thing was another thing entirely."

He pressed his lips into a thin line to keep them from trembling. "But she . . . was the love of my life."

"So she was. What else?"

"She was beautiful."

"I'm sure of it. What else?"





So many words came to mind: Alive, playful, creative, painfully intelligent. However, from the hollow of his chest, something else arose.

“Cruel,” he breathed. “Manipulative. Angry.”

“Yes. And?”

He sucked in the cold air through his teeth. “Abu . . . she was abusive - she - she - “ he dropped his head into his hands, struggling to breathe.

“It’s alright, follow the breathing techniques.”

“No, no.” He sat up, hardening his voice despite the way every atom of his being shook. “She hurt me, she - she abused me. And I . . . and I loved her. I loved her but . . . I - I hated her. I hated her. I hated her!”

The words were out like he had spat out a decade of poison building up in his stomach, in his chest. He took big breaths from his mouth as if he had just finished running a marathon and then, the tears came.

Dr. Jean’s voice soothed him from her place in front of him. “And now?”

He looked up through a mess of tears, through the wet hair falling into his eyes. He saw her standing behind Dr. Jean. Angry, ethereal, rage clouding her vision. Then he looked back at Dr. Jean who continued smiling at him.

He forced his lips to curve upwards and breathed out his words: “I’m free.”



THE CONFINEMENT WITHIN

The walls of my room are wedging close
Ceiling fan is chanting an unknown lore
Dewdrops fall weary on summer-dried rose
As blood drops touch the thirsty floor.

A worm treads tumultuously on my bruised arm
Carcinogenic smoke pollinating the usual harm
Solitary moon shines with all its charm
As the beats of my heart are anything but calm

A pungent wave of pain conquers my chest
And crippling reality dances in a silhouette undressed
The demons within, poking with taunting jest
As the darkness begins to appear from west.

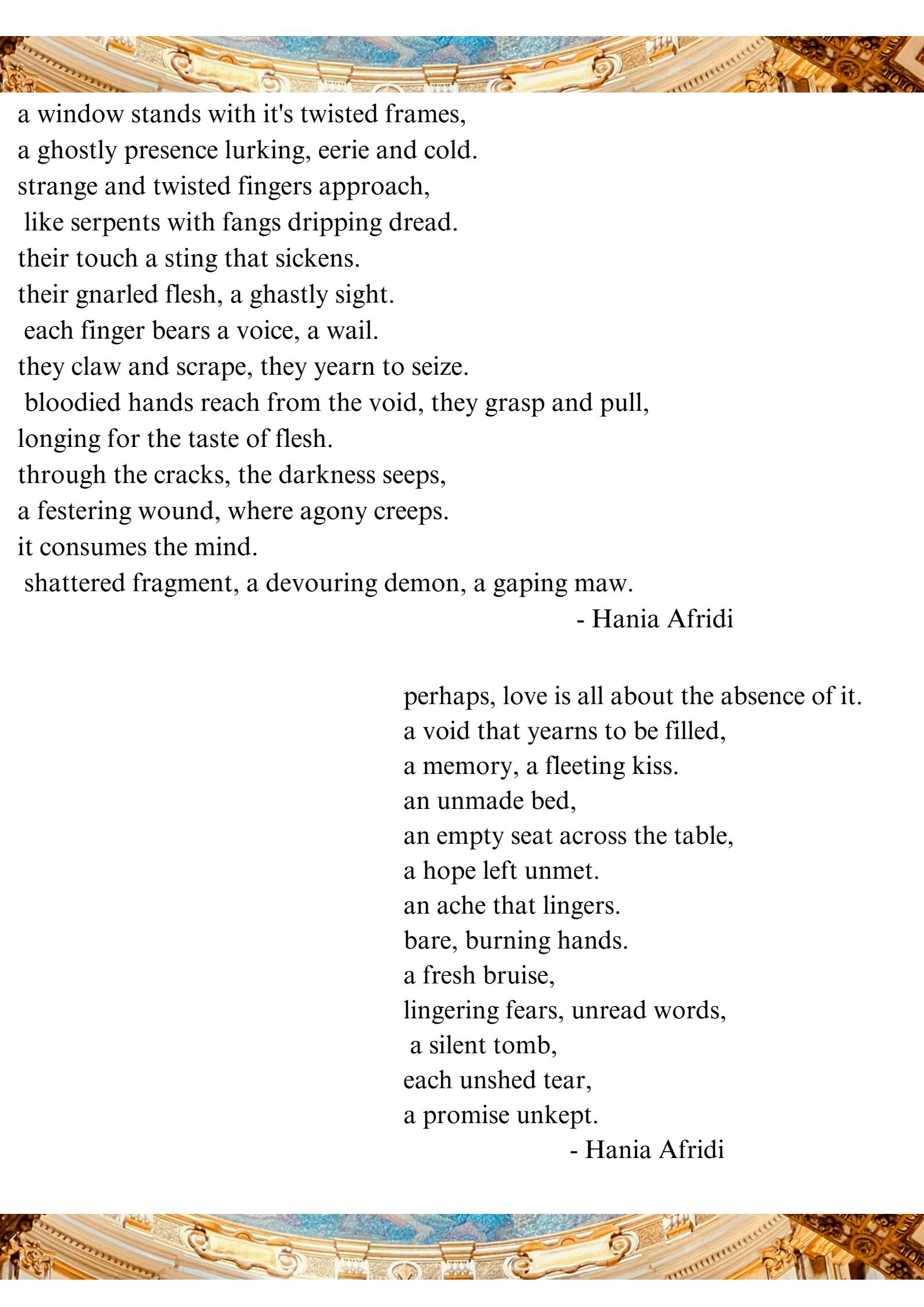
Down in my shadow, a nightmare breeds,
Devouring the echoes of agony and need.
My limbs entwined in a sinister dance,
As fate's cruel hand grants its final chance.

The Reaper's embrace, cold and sublime,
As life slips away, in the matter of time.
Silent screams pierce the shroud of night,
As the last breath escapes, swallowed by fright.

In this loud eerie silence, where dreams decay,
My silent lament fades, in subtle disarray.
The room now empty is mausoleum of pain,
A tragic riddance of poet just went in vain.

- Hamza Shah





a window stands with it's twisted frames,
a ghostly presence lurking, eerie and cold.
strange and twisted fingers approach,
like serpents with fangs dripping dread.
their touch a sting that sickens.
their gnarled flesh, a ghastly sight.
each finger bears a voice, a wail.
they claw and scrape, they yearn to seize.
bloodied hands reach from the void, they grasp and pull,
longing for the taste of flesh.
through the cracks, the darkness seeps,
a festering wound, where agony creeps.
it consumes the mind.
shattered fragment, a devouring demon, a gaping maw.

- Hania Afridi

perhaps, love is all about the absence of it.
a void that yearns to be filled,
a memory, a fleeting kiss.
an unmade bed,
an empty seat across the table,
a hope left unmet.
an ache that lingers.
bare, burning hands.
a fresh bruise,
lingering fears, unread words,
a silent tomb,
each unshed tear,
a promise unkept.

- Hania Afridi



I am joy reincarnate
i am the first snow on young lovers' hair
I am the warm sunshine in hades' lair
I am the draft of wind encouraging icarus further
I am the unbroken promise that the soldier murmurs.

I am joy reincarnate (my pillow is drenched)
I am the first snow on young lovers' hair (the bitter pill melts on my tongue)
I am the warm sunshine in hades' lair (I vomit out shards of my lungs)
I am the draft encouraging incarus further (my skin is charred, ablaze)
I am the unbroken promise that the soldier murmurs (the blade sinks, lovely and warm, into my inviting veins)

- Rubab Aamir

The beat is all wrong in me
amidst my own, I become a plea
unheard like the bird – the eye of abyss
all alone – I become
the poet, the muse, the verse
all at once –

- Sawera Dedar



فرق - سُدیس رفیق

والله نہ کوئی
وصال جان فِزا ، فراق جان گسل
نہ کوئی حریف ہے
نہ غم مجھ کو تجدید وفا کا
نہ پیمان، نہ جواز، نہ ازل، نہ شرر یا قفس
نہ غم دوران و جاناں
یہ دریچہ محض مگر
یہ مُختبر بتا گیا
یہ جو خُلد ہے ، یہ جھوٹ ہے
میری زندگی تو رنج ہے
یہ دریچہ جو رُخ میں ہے
کچھ تلخیاں دیکھا گیا

اُول اُول تو دیکھی گردش
حوالوں کی، زندگی کی
آخر آخر وہ سب دیکھا جو مجھ پہ تو ممنوع رہا
دریچہ دکھاتا رہا زندگی
مجھ بُت ہے مہر کو بس
اس فرق کے تماشے کا سوال تھا
ہے غبار کیوں میری طرف ؟
کیوں اُس طرف ہے زندگی اور زندگی کے سلسلے
یہ فرق ہے، سو کیوں ہی ہے ؟
کیا میرا کوئی خدا نہیں ؟
یا میرا خدا بخیل ہے ؟
میں کافروں کا گر خدا
تو اُس پار کے کلمہ گو ہی کیوں ؟
اب بلند ہوں بھی تو بھی ہوں میں پست
یہ عروج ہے یا زوال ہے ؟
یہ سوال ہے ، یہ سوال ہے



Pane-staking Temptations - An Essay by Ayza Malik

Temptation, craving, hope, and longing—these are the emotional undercurrents that weave through the tapestry of literature, often embodied by the symbol of windows. Throughout history, windows have served as potent yet camouflaged symbols, beckoning characters and readers alike to peer into other worlds, both literal and metaphorical.

In examining the tradition of windows in literature, it becomes apparent that their significance transcends mere physical openings in walls. They can manifest as cracks, bullet holes, or even involuntary entrances made by nature or rodents. Regardless of their form, windows serve as bait—enticing characters to take action, to explore the unknown, and to confront their desires and fears.

However, the consequences of succumbing to temptation are often dire. Disappointment, disillusionment, and the harsh reality of one's choices loom on the other side of the windowpane. These repercussions extend beyond the characters themselves, impacting the aesthetic position of readers. Readers are not passive voyeurs; they are active participants in the narrative, equally affected by the aftermath of characters' decisions.

To support this argument, we can draw upon various literary and theoretical works. For instance, in Nathaniel Hawthorne's "The Scarlet Letter," the window of Hester Prynne's prison cell becomes a symbol of her isolation and societal condemnation. Similarly, in F. Scott Fitzgerald's "The Great Gatsby," the green light across the bay serves as a tantalizing beacon of hope for Jay Gatsby, ultimately leading to his downfall.

Additionally, Jacques Lacan's concept of the "gaze" offers a compelling lens through which to examine the allure of windows in literature.



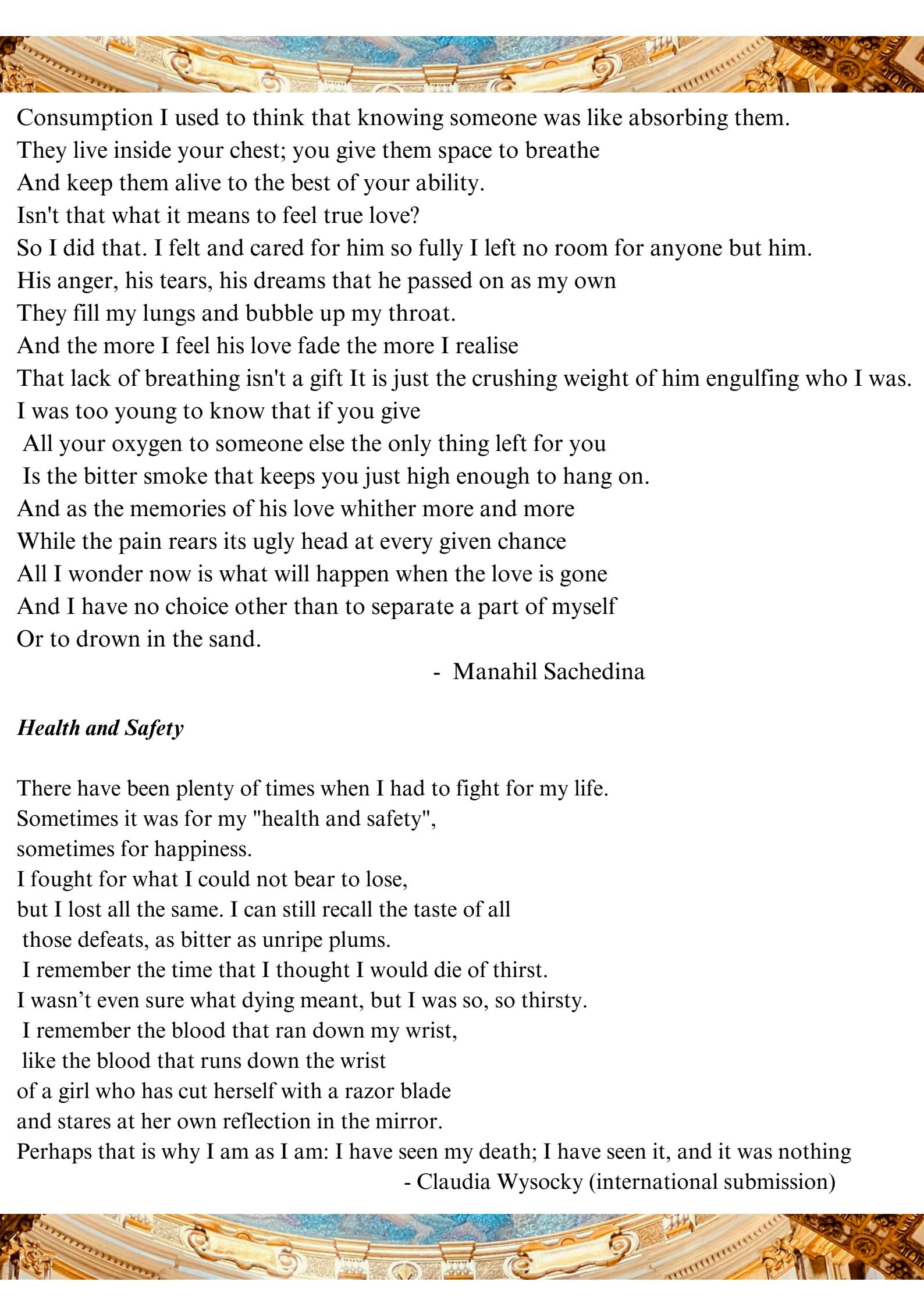


According to Lacan, the gaze is not simply a visual act but a psychological phenomenon imbued with power and desire. In literature, windows often become focal points for characters' gazes, symbolizing their desires and aspirations. However, Lacan also emphasizes the inherent lack and fragmentation of the gaze, suggesting that the objects of desire viewed through windows are always incomplete and elusive.

Furthermore, the concept of the window as bait can be explored through the lens of psychoanalytic theory. Sigmund Freud's notion of the "pleasure principle" suggests that humans are driven by the pursuit of pleasure and the avoidance of pain. In literature, windows often represent the promise of pleasure—a glimpse into a world of possibility. Yet, as Freud posited, the pursuit of pleasure can also lead to conflict and suffering.

The window is not an active barrier, but a passive one. Windows are an enigma in plain sight but the most that they represent is a choice. The choice to reach out, step out, look out. If Bill Gates could take that choice, so can we.





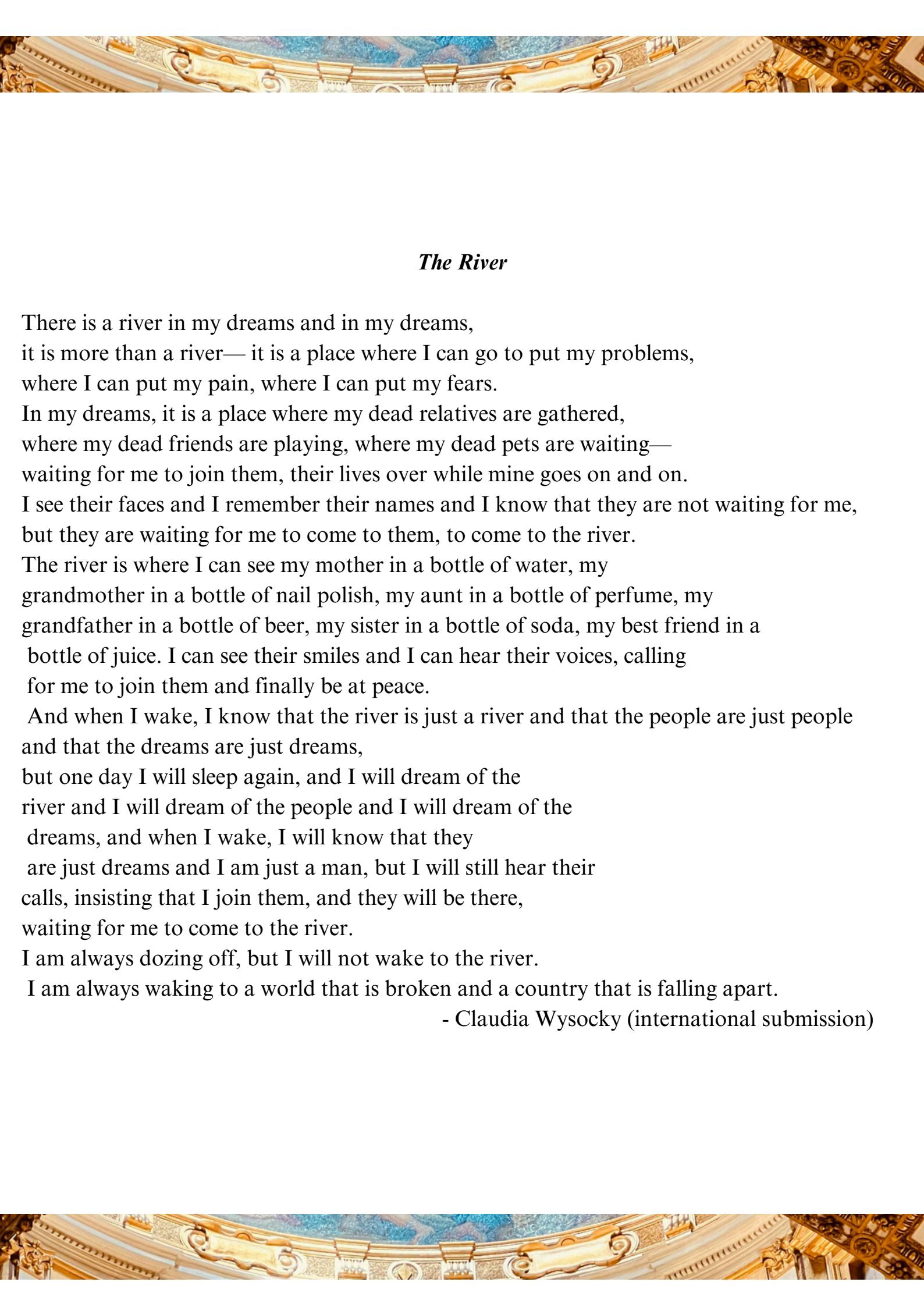
Consumption I used to think that knowing someone was like absorbing them.
They live inside your chest; you give them space to breathe
And keep them alive to the best of your ability.
Isn't that what it means to feel true love?
So I did that. I felt and cared for him so fully I left no room for anyone but him.
His anger, his tears, his dreams that he passed on as my own
They fill my lungs and bubble up my throat.
And the more I feel his love fade the more I realise
That lack of breathing isn't a gift It is just the crushing weight of him engulfing who I was.
I was too young to know that if you give
All your oxygen to someone else the only thing left for you
Is the bitter smoke that keeps you just high enough to hang on.
And as the memories of his love whither more and more
While the pain rears its ugly head at every given chance
All I wonder now is what will happen when the love is gone
And I have no choice other than to separate a part of myself
Or to drown in the sand.

- Manahil Sachedina

Health and Safety

There have been plenty of times when I had to fight for my life.
Sometimes it was for my "health and safety",
sometimes for happiness.
I fought for what I could not bear to lose,
but I lost all the same. I can still recall the taste of all
those defeats, as bitter as unripe plums.
I remember the time that I thought I would die of thirst.
I wasn't even sure what dying meant, but I was so, so thirsty.
I remember the blood that ran down my wrist,
like the blood that runs down the wrist
of a girl who has cut herself with a razor blade
and stares at her own reflection in the mirror.
Perhaps that is why I am as I am: I have seen my death; I have seen it, and it was nothing

- Claudia Wysocky (international submission)



The River

There is a river in my dreams and in my dreams,
it is more than a river— it is a place where I can go to put my problems,
where I can put my pain, where I can put my fears.
In my dreams, it is a place where my dead relatives are gathered,
where my dead friends are playing, where my dead pets are waiting—
waiting for me to join them, their lives over while mine goes on and on.
I see their faces and I remember their names and I know that they are not waiting for me,
but they are waiting for me to come to them, to come to the river.
The river is where I can see my mother in a bottle of water, my
grandmother in a bottle of nail polish, my aunt in a bottle of perfume, my
grandfather in a bottle of beer, my sister in a bottle of soda, my best friend in a
bottle of juice. I can see their smiles and I can hear their voices, calling
for me to join them and finally be at peace.
And when I wake, I know that the river is just a river and that the people are just people
and that the dreams are just dreams,
but one day I will sleep again, and I will dream of the
river and I will dream of the people and I will dream of the
dreams, and when I wake, I will know that they
are just dreams and I am just a man, but I will still hear their
calls, insisting that I join them, and they will be there,
waiting for me to come to the river.
I am always dozing off, but I will not wake to the river.
I am always waking to a world that is broken and a country that is falling apart.

- Claudia Wysocky (international submission)



BROKEN GLASS OF THE WINDOW

There's still some life left in me,
It's a blur of what's going to be,
Covered in dust, dirt, and filth,
How bad or worse can it be
A dash of drizzle though makes a way,
May a fresh thought take a moment to stay,
There's some light still passing by,
Showing the odds my lonely side
Not shattered, crumbled, or broken apart,
Pinning the miseries for a new start,
Now I am old and weak but hanging in there,
The cracks on my face are so much clearer,
Embodying the struggle and how I persevered,
Wind to wind and time to time,
Hope is now peeking through,
Oh life! Now you are seeking too,
After smacking me hard with your bitter truth,
With the harsh blow that made me glow,
Who am I?
I'll let you know,
I am the broken glass of the window.

- Abdullah Bin Asad

An open window, or even a closed one for that matter, births embryonic hope. From scratch, fresh, uncalloused. It takes root in the form of a crepuscular ray, failing the eye to identify until it finally meets the iris and it dilates from the connection. It now sees, the ray patterning iridescently on the glass of the window, as though serving as a natural suncatcher. And for the fun part, this is all the exposition of when the window isn't fully open, or open at all. When its doors are pushed back, it divulges ethereal realities through its limited opening. Those that were chosen never to open eyes to, that were always present, even if behind a curtain. Step after step, cutting inches out, the brewing hope leads and reaches out to the splinters of the old, lost hope. In it, it sees the vestiges of its own traits echoing, but pulverized and meek. None like its colours, contrary to its steadiness. As at last the bits are gone, it lays in. Sowing dreams and halcyons the end of which will always see a window, open or closed. But so full of hope, nonetheless.

- Pixie Paris

ہم محبتوں کے گل کھلائے بیٹھے بیس
وہ نفرتوں کے چراغ جلائے بیٹھے بیس

وہ جانتے ہیں نہیں بیس یہ مدعا دل کا
اور ہم، کہ انہیں خود سے ملائے بیٹھے بیس

وہ سوچتے ہیں کہ جیت بوگئی یہ ان کی
انہیں خبر ہی نہیں کہ ہار کھائے بیٹھے بیس

نہ عشق یے نہ محبت یے ان سے سعدیہ
ہم تو یوں ہی انہیں خیالوں میں سمائے بیٹھے بیس

(حلیمه سعدیہ)



OUT OF LOVE

In dead winters, blew the silent winds
And the footsteps started to dim. Winds were cold and so were you;
Did charcoal quench or it rained within?

In the nights I sat by my window,
Joining the dots you left behind;
Wondering what resembles love,
If not “a fire that's kind”.

Did your fingers ever run down my spine,
Or were those always the Fireflies? Was love ever enough to fall in it,
Or just stories to scribble all life?

Those whispers turning to deafening noises,
The moments passed before time.
My breaths getting heavier on chest
Or is it your soul, turning me sublime?

Stars drowned in the dingy dust. The love line vanished on my palms,
Or had destiny had its own plans?
Is that how you fell out of love?

Should unrequited love be love at all?
Not all eros have Aphrodites.
But how does love get lost within
It must be stolen by time.

- Ratikant Ritwik (international submission)





THE POETIC REBELLION OF ANTS

Self-proclaimed slaveries. (Obviously false).
Mutual and narcissistic gods. (Obviously false).
Peels of words. (Obviously empty).
Silent music without rhythm. (As this song is).
Unlinked words. (As these are).
Products for products. (Non-Poetry for Non-Poets).
Reflections that do not flex,
repeatable feelings,
idealizations without contours.
An ant that carries no weight,
an ant with lots of money,
crying human things,
because she's an idiot.
A queen ant
that didn't carry a single leaf
to save her people.
(A queen ant) that didn't bring new ants,
but being sterile sterilized.
A self-proclaimed queen goddess, crying for a god that isn't God
in a scratched record of emotions
of social networks that are storms
inside the plastic anthill.
Plastic ants,
carrying plastic leaves
and in a plastic anthill
eating the queen's plastic leftovers
until they die.
Imitating the imitable to be kings and queens
and they achieve it, but in doing so they realize
that everything remains the same,
they were born workers in plastic, they will die workers in plastic.
A song without rhythm or link for a people without rhythm or link.
A complaint in a book of blessings.
Greetings from a drone
who's willing to die for the true queen of words.
Death to plastic.

- Tomàs Emilio Sànchez Valdès (international submission)





FOUR SEASONS OF POETIC REBELLION

Oppressive snowfall
with lingering heat
of machine flesh.
They diminish words,
halting the onset of spring.
Motionless leaves
in perfect appearance,
halt the History.
The false suns
don't favour the world
that exists within us.

- Tomàs Emilio Sànchez Valdès (international submission)

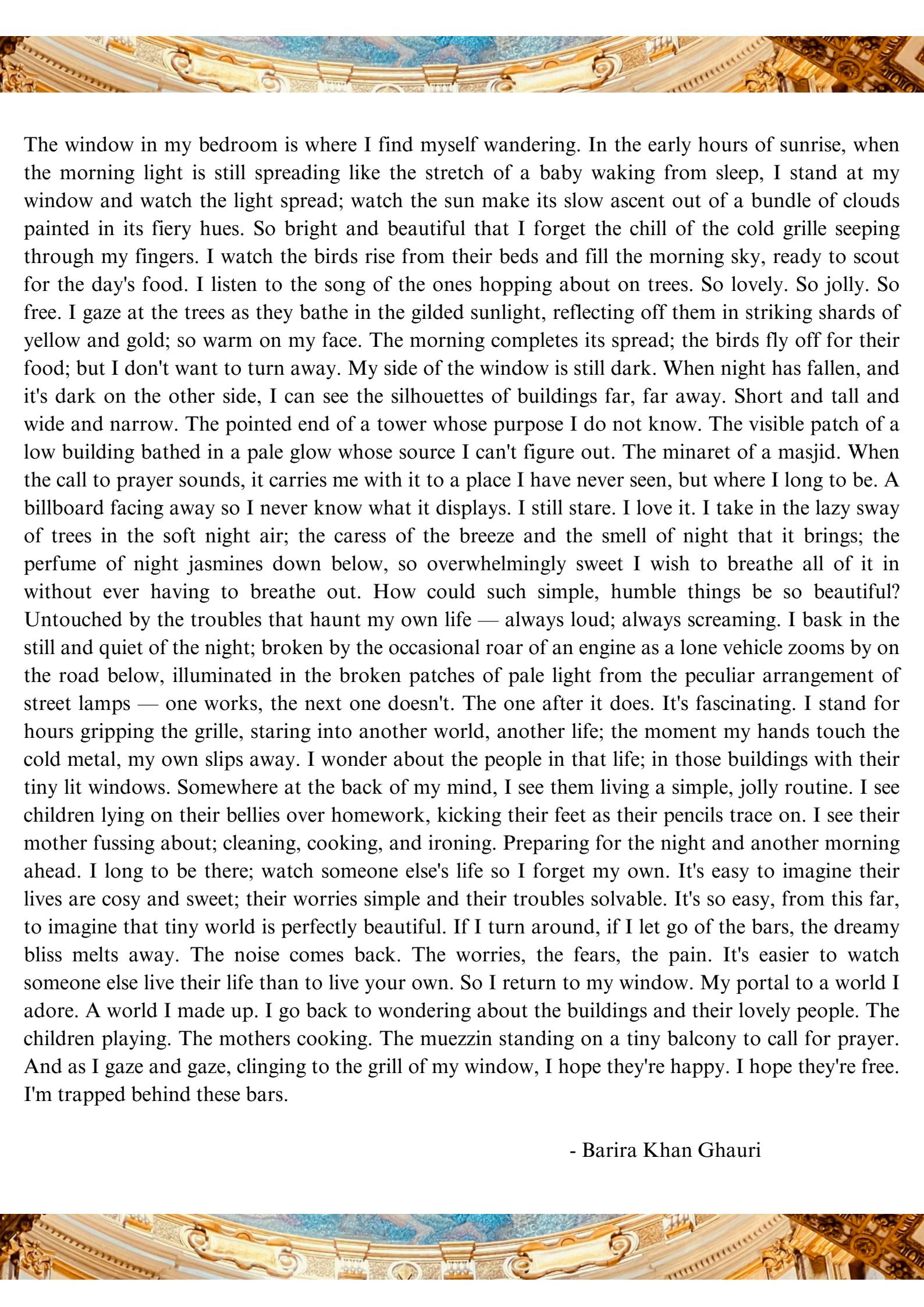
MANIFESTO OF THE POETIC REBELLION

The poetry reads herself,*
she forces you to write her,
to write above what has been written.
She forces you to sing her.
The poetry teaches not as a schoolmistress,
but as a friend.
And if it can't be sung, then SHE IS NOT POETRY.
The axe blow of ice, the fire storm,
the caress that is warm, sweet kisses... LET'S SING POETRY!

- Tomàs Emilio Sànchez Valdès (international submission)

*In Spanish “Poetry” is a female word, so I translated the pronoun as “She” to get better the original contemplation, even though it normally would be translated as “It”.





The window in my bedroom is where I find myself wandering. In the early hours of sunrise, when the morning light is still spreading like the stretch of a baby waking from sleep, I stand at my window and watch the light spread; watch the sun make its slow ascent out of a bundle of clouds painted in its fiery hues. So bright and beautiful that I forget the chill of the cold grille seeping through my fingers. I watch the birds rise from their beds and fill the morning sky, ready to scout for the day's food. I listen to the song of the ones hopping about on trees. So lovely. So jolly. So free. I gaze at the trees as they bathe in the gilded sunlight, reflecting off them in striking shards of yellow and gold; so warm on my face. The morning completes its spread; the birds fly off for their food; but I don't want to turn away. My side of the window is still dark. When night has fallen, and it's dark on the other side, I can see the silhouettes of buildings far, far away. Short and tall and wide and narrow. The pointed end of a tower whose purpose I do not know. The visible patch of a low building bathed in a pale glow whose source I can't figure out. The minaret of a masjid. When the call to prayer sounds, it carries me with it to a place I have never seen, but where I long to be. A billboard facing away so I never know what it displays. I still stare. I love it. I take in the lazy sway of trees in the soft night air; the caress of the breeze and the smell of night that it brings; the perfume of night jasmines down below, so overwhelmingly sweet I wish to breathe all of it in without ever having to breathe out. How could such simple, humble things be so beautiful? Untouched by the troubles that haunt my own life — always loud; always screaming. I bask in the still and quiet of the night; broken by the occasional roar of an engine as a lone vehicle zooms by on the road below, illuminated in the broken patches of pale light from the peculiar arrangement of street lamps — one works, the next one doesn't. The one after it does. It's fascinating. I stand for hours gripping the grille, staring into another world, another life; the moment my hands touch the cold metal, my own slips away. I wonder about the people in that life; in those buildings with their tiny lit windows. Somewhere at the back of my mind, I see them living a simple, jolly routine. I see children lying on their bellies over homework, kicking their feet as their pencils trace on. I see their mother fussing about; cleaning, cooking, and ironing. Preparing for the night and another morning ahead. I long to be there; watch someone else's life so I forget my own. It's easy to imagine their lives are cosy and sweet; their worries simple and their troubles solvable. It's so easy, from this far, to imagine that tiny world is perfectly beautiful. If I turn around, if I let go of the bars, the dreamy bliss melts away. The noise comes back. The worries, the fears, the pain. It's easier to watch someone else live their life than to live your own. So I return to my window. My portal to a world I adore. A world I made up. I go back to wondering about the buildings and their lovely people. The children playing. The mothers cooking. The muezzin standing on a tiny balcony to call for prayer. And as I gaze and gaze, clinging to the grill of my window, I hope they're happy. I hope they're free. I'm trapped behind these bars.

- Barira Khan Ghauri