

## From the Sub-Editor, *A Prologue*

This editorial from the pen of the sub-editor is a *performance*. This magazine in your hands as eyes trace out every word, then the gaze flickers and it moves on; a reader – a performance. So what is performance? Where does it begin, where does it end, and does it ever?

To me, performance is a fluid concept; ever changing. Fragments and pieces of subtle actions that converge to form some semblance of a whole; bits and pieces woven together to give abstraction an identity, an ultimate concreteness. But does this wholeness, this concreteness last? Perhaps not. It transitions. Like water, it swirls and slushes until it takes the shape of the container and once poured out, it flows again. But what drives this performance, this act of flowing and embodying? Is it a call of the conscious or does it echo from the depths of the unconscious to ultimately conquer that which marvels just out of reach – this ideal self, this *other*? If every performance is a step taken towards eventually embodying an ideal, reaching that perfect sense of harmony and engulfing it, the question then shifts – is there an ideal self?

The concept cannot be theorised adequately, and The Falconer does not aim to either. It aims instead to present a synchrony of thoughts and experiences that eventually account for performance. This issue, in itself, is also a performance, a first averting step from the concrete stricture that had become the standard. The theme is only a cover, a mask. This issue is different from the past issues as it is the first in which we branch out beyond the thematic premise: Aamna's piece on Eliot's *Wasteland* deals with many performative interpretations of the work – a performance in itself by the poet. It also puts forth the idea of the ideal self that the poet believes a 'particular performance' could help achieve as it had once done in the past. The element of nostalgia about a transcendental position, owned and lost, is then what births the very desire and in turn drives the performance out of him. The desire to embody the ideal is thus a perpetual cycle of reaching for the ideal and falling short of it, and yet it is also a celebratory retrospection on the iconic poem's centennial.

Meanwhile, astounding outpours by Shehzeen in *Performance: Life & Hamlet* and Bushra in *My neighbour puts on a show* corner us with another conundrum about performance and reality. What is reality and can it be completely altered by the performance put forth by the institutions that constitute the said *reality*? Where does performance end and reality begin? Does the gossamer curtain that separate the two exist? Or is the *reality* we believe to be objective and concrete just an amalgamation of many performances?

With oodles of questions in mind and no conscious realisation in sight, we continue to perform. A costume for every circle of life that slips on itself and starts spurting out actions that ultimately force a distorted image of an identity to birth. But when this costume, this mask, which the cover of the magazine symbolises, comes off, and the performance ends (that is if it can end), what incomprehensible horror/s would we come face to face with?

Zonera Asim  
(3rd Year, Morning)

## ***The Waste Land: A Significant “Grouse Against Life”***

**Aamna Motala (Faculty)**

A hundred years ago *The Waste Land* by T. S. Eliot appeared in print. It captured the spiritual and cultural depravity that became a defining element of the modern, post-war age that Eliot belonged to. Its context is multifaceted. It is influenced by the Great War that changed the world politically and socially. The poem thematically builds upon the destruction of modern cities, the rising sense of disillusionment, the acceleration in the movement of life, the disavowal of religious sentiment and the marked sense of futility and despair that dominated post-war Europe.

Moreover, Eliot's personal life became part of the poem's context. His unhappy marriage as well as a variety of physical and mental health concerns add to the poem's morose sense of enervation. This much is commonly known about the poem. Yet it doesn't suffice as an answer when one asks why *The Waste Land* remains so critically important even today. Surely its value is not merely owing to the poet's excellent sense of self-expression. And while its context has been of great importance for all its readers and scholars alike, if all it offers is a poetic account of life in post-war Europe (as the sheer amount of historical and ethnographic analyses on it would suggest), then there is an immense amount of poetry belonging to the same decade that offer the same insight. Ezra Pound's *Hugh Selwyn Mauberly* is a critique of modern life, and Yeats' *The Second Coming* is often compared to *The Waste Land* in terms of its depiction of disillusionment of a society. One aspect of *The Waste Land* that distinguishes it from other poems of the period is not the poem's ability to represent the past it belonged to but its astounding capacity to continue to represent the present. It is not just a poem that is important but one that is *presently* and *continually* important.

*The Waste Land* is representative of Eliot's own conception of poetry. He notes in *A*

*Note on War Poetry:*

*But the abstract conception*

*Of private experience at its greatest intensity*

*Becoming universal, which we call 'poetry,' May  
be affirmed in verse.*

And as he defines in *Tradition and the Individual Talent*, poetry is that which emerges from “a very great number of experiences which to the practical and active person would not seem to be experiences at all.” For Eliot, then, poetry is experiential: it is either of the “greatest intensity” or it gives voice to those experiences that are difficult to see or explain. *The Waste Land* is an experiential poem in both of these ways. The fragmentation captures what the coherent fullness of direct expression could not. It is the poem's fragmentation that enlarges it. The montage of various conversations, voices, allusions, scenes and languages puts together an all too large and full of noise world into a singular yet overwhelming experience for its readers. Eliot

conceives the world as disarrayed and in such a world, boundaries and margins dissipate. The use of allusion in the poem paradoxically captures the amalgamation of cultures, histories, and traditions through their disintegration. You find images from Greek mythology and Sanskrit texts juxtaposed with writers from the Western canon such as Dante, Marvell, and Shakespeare. The allusions move through the text and into each other, achieving their meaning through their relation to each other. The poem even concludes in such a collation as in “The Fire Sermon”,

Eliot places the allusion of the Buddhist fire sermon side by side with the allusion to St.

Augustine’s *Confessions*:

*To Carthage then I came*

*Burning burning burning burning*

*O Lord Thou pluckest me out*

*O Lord Thou pluckest burning.*

Thus, in the poem, meaning is neither static nor permanent. It is transient, continually changing as our experiences of the world change. Whether we find the poem’s feeling of exhaustion and its dry and desolate imagery of death as an important parallel to our collective lives during the pandemic or find something personal and intimate in the poem’s depiction of deteriorating modern relationships, what the poem has to say seems to alter itself to meet our needs. It meets us halfway. *The Waste Land* is a postcard of the past and the present.

It would be a mistake or a severe injustice to only read *The Waste Land* from one approach, one direction, or one interpretation. Critics have attempted to read it from the point of view of the Great War alone. Or they have tried to discover Eliot’s biography through the poem. And the mistake we, as readers, are prone to making: trying to discover a singular meaning by understanding the poem’s references and allusions alone, as if there is a fixed meaning there to be excavated. In Eliot’s own *Notes on ‘The Waste Land’*, one finds some annotations to suggest that the meaning is *not* within the allusion. For example, for the lines 199-201, “*O the moon shone bright on Mrs. Porter...*” Eliot states, “I do not know the origin of the ballad from which these lines are taken: it was reported to me from Sydney, Australia.” These singularly focused critical approaches to the text are not incorrect, but rather inappropriate. They do not do *The Waste Land* justice, nor do they reveal to us the true significance of the poem. Eliot, too, pushed against such readings of the poem. He declared at a lecture at Harvard that the poem is nothing but “the relief of a personal and wholly insignificant grouse against life.” To understand *The Waste Land*, one must look simultaneously outwards into the world and inwards into our own subjectivities and find the poem to reflect, significantly, *our grouse against life*.

## ***Performance: In Life and In Hamlet***

**Shehzeen Muzaffar (3rd Year, Evening)**

What is the first image that comes to your mind when the word “Performance” is mentioned? For me, it is *life*. For most, performance might be something that takes place on a stage with characters playing their parts, surrounded by the audience. But if we really think about it, isn't that essentially what life is? Every person that we encounter in our life and that includes myself as well, we tend to adopt personas based on our environment and the people around us. We adopt a skin of a character that might not be a true mirror of our one true self and shed that skin when it isn't needed anymore. Erwin Goffman in his most famous work, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, theorised that essentially each person's social life is a series of performances. He argued that each person in their lives put on several performances or adopted personas based on their ever-changing environment.

He used the imagery of a theatre to portray the importance of human and social interactions. In social interactions, humans are actors on a stage playing a performance for an audience. The only time a person can be themselves is when they are backstage surrounded by nothing but their self and thoughts. The idea of adopted personas is not new and writers and artists throughout the centuries have used these very personas and the act of putting on a performance in their works. Taylor swift in her song, *Mirrorball*, talks about the very idea of changing personalities to fit in. The desperate attempts a person makes to keep everyone around them, to continue looking at them. In her song, she also touches upon the idea of a circus and how that is an important part of each persona we tend to adopt and the purpose of that performance is simply this: to keep the audience enchanted and to somehow fit in the ordered chaos of life.

Performance, therefore, may be seen as something of a bridge between life and theatre. It exists in both, and helps us understand the complexities of both as well. We can travel from theatre to life through our understanding of performance as both of them are so intimately connected. In *As you like it*, William Shakespeare expresses a very similar idea through a very famous speech in which he calls the world a stage and its people players who play their part and exit the stage or the world.

Similarly, Hamlet – both the character and the play in which he appears – is deeply focused on performance. In his very first scene, Hamlet talks about the boundaries between performance

and reality and throughout the play he keeps questioning as to what is real and what is not. When his mother asks why his grief 'seems...so particular,' so unlike the grief of bereaved sons, Hamlet completely deflects her question and focuses on the 'seeming' of his emotions. According to Hamlet, outward displays of emotions can be faked and the truth is what lies beneath the surface. So while Hamlet does look like someone who is in mourning, his apparent grief might not be his reality. This very show between performance and reality is what occupies Hamlet throughout the play. Hamlet has often been described as someone who is unable to make up his mind but he could also as easily be described as someone who is deliberately putting on a play, a show to test his Uncle Claudius and see if he really is the murderer of his father.

At last, when it is proved that Claudius really is the one who killed his father, Hamlet once again ponders on the deceitful appearance that was put forth by his uncle. He says, 'meet it is I set down/ that one may smile, and smile, and may be a villain!'

Hamlet's endless soliloquies make him a theatrical character who wants all the attention of the world on himself. From playing a part of a bereaved son to a passionate lover to a mad man to someone avenging his father, he does it all and does it perfectly too. Hamlet may have started the play by questioning the blurring lines between reality and performance but the way he ends it, makes the performance a part of reality.

So, what is performance and what is reality? Are they two different things or a mixture of both? In my opinion, I think performance is what makes up our life and shapes social interactions; intertwining inexplicably both reality and the course of the performance as it plays along. It might be something we are doing intentionally or unintentionally but it is definitely something ingrained in all of us and we sometimes put on a show without even realising it and that, I think is the true essence of performance.

## ***My neighbour puts on a show***

**Bushra Naz (2nd Year, Morning)**

When I was 6 years old I played the part of a baby bear in 'Goldilocks and the Three Bears' for a talent show in school. That was my first formal introduction to performance. A rehearsed and planned affair of things, and yet stage fright is a real phenomenon. Perhaps, that fear comes with being aware of your potential while scaling up the path to achieve it – whatever that *it* might be. Or maybe, stage fright comes from this primitive terror of being watched. Or maybe – and this is the simplest one and the one that I believe in – stage fright comes from messing up when everyone knows what you were supposed to do.

All the world's a stage, said Shakespeare dearest. He was, of course, absolutely correct, for who better could know what performance is than the bard himself. Indeed, he was the greatest showman. He put on show after show and counted upon his audience to put on theirs. And they did. They cheered and gasped at the right places and teared up, cocooned in that public intimacy that is so unique to theatres. I find myself one such performer every day. I too have searched for a metaphor to envelope the purpose of my life in and as I grow older I realise that the metaphor resided where I looked for it the least. It was a common prop in all the Acts of My Life so far and yet it had made the most sense when the curtains were down. It was an event in itself.

There is nothing particularly note-worthy about this event. But it still remains a thing of beauty. My neighbour is a *kabootar baaz*, which means that before the pinks and purples and alluring blues of the sky, pigeons of various hues and prints dance on his commands. I never understood animal training as a concept. But I sure do find myself summoned from my scrutinised life to play the audience as twenty beautiful birds flap and dip and soar in sync with whooshing sounds, captivating the listener the same way one's ears expect the thunder after lightning. So I lay on my back and let it consume me. The curtains fall and the show begins.

The neighbour passed the act down to his son, the same way that it was my mother who beheld this act before me. The act never changed. The same coos and shrieks used as commands. The same area of the roof. Assigned places. The same sky. And yet everything is different. I play the faceless neighbour quite effortlessly. God knows why. Sometimes when I lay on my back, thoughts from across the curtain make their way into my mind. The pigeons fly past too quickly then, and evening turns dark too soon. I hope that this show behind the show never stops, even if this wretched performer is snatched away to the other side of the curtain. The show must go on.

## ***From the English Department***

these halls wind around the dip of your throat so smooth,  
 the sickening breaks of giggles and gasps,  
 the promised wonderland of the gods and men,  
 but the doorway between the cracked marble, allows these serpents to trap.

tap, tap, tap. these cracks start to grow.  
 this dilapidated screen over your eyes  
 is just the start of the show.  
 the promised wonderland, the screams and gasps,  
 these hallways, these hallways, these mazes, these skies,  
 where again were you meant to seek those traps?

***Rubab Amir***  
***BS 1st Year, Morning***

## ***Obedient***

I crumble to the thought of a new world in sight,  
 when the past lay in shambles  
 stored away in the monstrous urge to destruct  
 then mend and destruct and mend again  
 or at least try to; at least lie to  
 with no such thing as an apology to ones,  
 who shelter in them the need to allow  
 where you lay still and get chipped away in an instant  
 swarming in disgusting filth,  
 coming out of disgraceful tongues, that do you no good  
 the desire to ask, to obey  
 forgiven yet so distantly innate  
 with a gesture of a finger on your lips  
 it all begins again.

***Rafia Manzar***  
***3rd Year, Evening***

***Onward, Alone***

The road blurs  
 Before your gaze  
 You, who exist  
 Memory by memory  
 No comrade, nobody  
 To speak with for days.  
 Thoughts of sun, sand  
 And your father's caravan  
 Never fail to plague  
 A well-walked mind,  
 You, young one,  
 With your head full of haze.  
 Ambition dripping,  
 Dreams brimming,  
 Soon to be void of life  
 Your pair of eyes  
 Slowly turn black from brown  
 Downward your descent  
 As inward you drown  
 Getting sucked in the path  
 You stepped on to curb  
 Your wanderlust  
 But one now you must  
 Not turn back from —  
 There's far too much  
 You've left behind.  
 You remember,  
 don't you,  
 The good old times  
 When it was fun to stray  
 Aimless?  
 If only it had stayed  
 So all along  
 Maybe,  
 You'd still be dancing  
 To those tunes you composed,  
 To the verses  
 Reeking suspiciously  
 Of the girl living next door  
 When you'd had a home.  
 Before you picked the road;  
 Before you fell alone.  
 Now,  
 broken and battered  
 Hope all shattered  
 Your heart and soul

***Duaa Azim***  
***2nd Year, Morning***



*Dear Destiny,  
 Change your route,  
 And reach me don't.  
 I, Oedipus.  
 Better be sightless,  
 From the truth,  
 Than embracing  
 All the words,  
 From Delphi.*

*Dear Destiny,  
 I beg, do not,  
 Put me in jeopardy.  
 Because no man,  
 Can bear children,  
 From his mother.*

**Yumna Mansoor**  
**3rd Year, Evening**

Chamomile behind the bushes, in-between the thorns  
 Surrounded by no one, yearns to be known  
 Daffodils, lilies and tulips, poppies, orchids and jasmine.  
 Their colors are adored, but mine?  
 I exist, I bloom, yet nobody knows,  
 In the span of time, only the grief grows.  
 The bushes heave and blemish my being,  
 The thrones do not allow to reinstate my reign,  
 I alone grow, I alone shine,  
 I look around, to whom I shall show my glow?  
 I shed my petals, and only the grief grows

**Asma Naqvi**  
**MA, Morning**

***Where darkness lurks***

Darkness lurks amongst the trees,  
Heavens curse my prayers and pleas;

The shadows peeking through the smoke  
were faces once known, not mysteries.

Their whispers never seem to cease;  
Those impure murmurs of obscenities.

Do you sense the agony in their feeble croaks?  
Is it truth pushing at the iron seams?

Smothered in murk, once persistent dreams,  
Crumble, collapse, flutter away with the breeze.

A choir sings for the fallen leaves,  
A nightingale croons for the dead in grief,

The lark in harmony, the owls in concord;  
Their song, though beautiful, is, but brief.

Custodians of souls have come to reap,  
to gather the skeletons of victims in heaps,

They bless each soul with the death stroke,  
White turns grey as blackness seeps,

The heavens echo and groan, and heave,  
rousing the souls from the deepest of sleeps,

A multitude of ashen faces, bereft of hope,  
patiently await their slaughter like sheep,

As for the shadows: they take their leave,  
Beyond the forests and trees they retreat.

***Laiyba Ali***  
***MA, Morning***

things have a penchant for scattering  
expanding and expanding  
on both sides equally.

the stained pungent drugget  
unrolls and unrolls with its casual feet.  
all movement skids wide before me.

i stand, stilled by the suddenness  
of things flowing every elsewhere,  
diverging and drawing, swaying  
into the strange hold of heaven.

things—  
always an infinite inch away,  
always *awaying* from me

i were that once the fall would tip  
in my half—  
a drop to drip onto my starved  
raft.

some force out of which to diffuse  
the self  
through a steep strife,  
and to diffuse after all;

but i am too refused always,  
i am too brown with loss.

the preface to my being  
is an anthology of grief,  
and each word seeks the parcelling seal.

**Moaz Ahmed**  
**MA, Morning**

## ***Fragments***

(These pieces are excerpts from longer submissions by the students of the English Department)

"I want it to serve as a warning every time you even think about turning away from the thoughts in your head. You know these thoughts, the ones that curl around your neck like braided twine, whispering, waiting to strifle your mind with its rare poison. Do not look up at the ceiling, they say. You're not ready for what you may find. What will you do if the creature in your head peers down at you in all its delicious disfigurement? It tells you to not turn back in shrouded isolation, for what lurks is maligned eurydice, the vengeance of a broken promise lingering on her rotten breath. When you feel the ice of her fingertips on your rigid spine, I beg you to run faster. She isn't known for her mercy. Cradle your head in your palms, know not to indulge the silhouettes that dance around you, the swirling shadows that linger long after the waltz is over. It's there when you stare at the mirror for a little too long. The way your reflection blurs at its edges. Cover your mirrors for they can sense your defeat. Who knew, the witches had it right this whole time. The moment you give up is when it lurches with rancid sharp talons that bind you in dissociative captivity. It's dark. She's behind you, always is, but especially in complete absence of light. The echo of her sheer terror collides with your raw skin, marred with the stench of life. And she salivates at the sight of your exposed flesh, full of youth that she's never known. She suckles at your neck. Breathe in, breathe out. Your breath is still yours. But the vapour escaping your mouth in its ragged urgency is a feast she's been waiting for decades to consume. My years here have also taught me this: humans are born with the innate ability to sense movement. Each shudder that rakes through your body in waves divisive enough to crack your skin and each shiver that glides upon your skin in a darkened room bleeds harmoniously in your soul to tell you that reality is beyond what you see. You're not alone, it chants in your mind. It's not a statement and never has been, so heed the warning for what it is. Let paranoia weave your thoughts into a tapestry of fear, then use it as armour. Understanding this movement is the only way any of us survive."

On Movement,

Maham Owais (1st Year, Morning)

“Movement is a force of change, a law of nature preventing everything encompassed within the universe from falling stagnant. From cosmic bodies running away from the centre of the universe to atoms spinning eternally like a spell-bounded top. In the abstract, movement is even more powerful: social movements have altered the course of history several times. Movement is necessary for survival. Nothing revolutionary there. What is revolutionary though is the departing from the ordinary, and accepting the extraordinary. In this moment of meditation something had clicked; he had accepted his imperfections, finally allowing himself to float. He drew a deep breath. It felt like someone had cut the rope that tied him down. Unburdened from his crushing guilt, he started swimming — he had started moving again. He fired up his laptop and started typing. Words that had previously evaded him now came as natural as breathing. A maestro artfully applying brush strokes would be an apt description. His expressions felt organic, sentences coherent, and tone unforced. Once again, he was facing a wall blocking his path, though something was different. He remembered the walls being taller than mountains — they were previously insurmountable. But this one tiny: he effortlessly jumped over it. He had finished writing.”

Movement: An Agent of Change,  
(Noman Ahmed, First Year)

“Difference in realities lead to different experiences, so according to what system, structure or even criteria should the true worth of any experience, let alone pain, be determined? And are all the experiences that do not fall under the set criteria, invalid? Which, perhaps, is a different form of pain as well; to be “otherized” for not being relatable enough, or perhaps not being different enough to be labeled as the ‘Other’, after all isn’t it a category itself? I perceive the general take towards objectivity in regards to pain as a form of pain itself.

The modern world, though accepting the element of subjectivity associated with the experience, has set boundaries for the word. To all the capitalists it is an aesthetic, a method for expanding revenue. To the brain-washed masses desperate for a purpose in this meaningless existence, it is simply an assortment of ‘negative energy’ or to be more precise; the absence of unicorns and rainbows. To the ones actually suffering and familiar with the experience, it is a demented piece of imagination that needs to be kept in check, lest there be consequences in the form of unwelcome stares laced with disgust and apathy, alongside the wrong kind of attention in essence to which the idea of non-existence feels welcoming. And then there’s the mosh pit of variations in between all the extremities, that can technically be regarded as the ‘grey’ but in all honesty that too is just a category. If this description can be picturized, then we have the most over-rated, pseudointellectual interpretation of Pain by a quasi-creative ‘deep thinker’. In actuality, these fancy adjectives are just decorative assortments that people use to numb down the intensity of its effects in reality. The concept of a ‘martyred’ toddler is easier to digest than a defenseless and dead one.”

On Pain,

Rameen Imran (Third Year, Evening)

***Paraphernalia***  
**Manal Fatmi (MA, Evening)**

*My father is dead.*

The thought sticks with me, like a piece of gnarly candy suffocating itself in the unreachable crevice between tooth and tooth. It has been a year since the heart attack, and as I wipe the dust off my monitor screen and turn the computer on, before the shapes of my thoughts can materialize, I feel a hand tap my shoulder. I turn to look, and standing in front of me, is Ahsan.

“Hey, how you holding up?” He asks and I notice how American his English sounds, almost as if he’s auditioning for a part in a McDonald’s commercial.

“I’m fine. Thanks for asking,” I answer, plainly, yet still my voice wavers towards the end of the sentence. My gaze falls to my hand covering the mouse, and I see hair sprouting out of my knuckles.

*My father is dead.*

I remember in the good days, when he was still working as a banker, he would wake up early on Sundays, and iron all of his ‘office’ shirts for the coming week. By the time that he was done, the collars of all his shirts would be crisp, which as he later informed me, was the true marker of a well-ironed shirt. He would later color-coordinate his shirts with a suitable dress pant (rose with beige, red with black, and maroon with brown), and if I insisted enough, he would put on a ‘fashion show’ just for me. As I judged and assessed the rainbow arsenal of clothing, giggling uncontrollably at the silly poses that he would strike, I would often find myself noting how blatantly black his hair was, and how the smallest quantity of it, such as the dense patch on his knuckles and fingers, would stand out against a crème shirt. Once, years after he had lost his job, I had joked that it was because of his genes that I was so hairy, and he had smashed my favorite mug against the wall. I learnt then, that brown stains against a beige wall are particularly hard to wash off. In the end, my mother and I had to repaint the whole wall, burying all my childhood drawings of witches and fairies under a coat of thick white paint.

“Are you sure? You just seem a little off,” Ahsan sits in the chair next to mine, and places a hand on the back of my chair. The chair wobbles a little, and I smile. If I were anyone else, I would have fallen for him a long time ago. I know for a fact that Sumrah has a crush on him, and I’ve

seen the way the other girls stare. He might also be appearing in a commercial sometime soon. Sitting next to him, I can smell the Pears soap underneath the expensive cologne. He's handsome too, in a boring, predictable, T.V kind of way. I sink further into my chair, and wait for my computer to light up.

"Do you have the number of that IT guy? Farooq?" I ask, as Ahsan fiddles with the chipped leather on the armrest. "It takes forever for my PC to start," I complain exaggeratedly.

"Are you seriously not going to answer my question?"

"What question?"

I get out of my seat, and flick my eyes to the floor. Devoid of any natural light, my office is every bit entity as it is corporate. Suited men, and shalwar-kameez clad women scurry through the small channels in between computers, desks and chairs, rushing to some manager or to some meeting. Everything here is fast-paced, and direct, and as a content-writer here, it is my job to produce three thousand words every single day. I was looking forward to writing today's story, which is why Ahsan's dwindling and demanding presence annoys me even more than usual.

"Where's Sumrah? She was supposed to be here thirty minutes ago."

"I don't know where Sumrah is." Ahsan replies, and his voice, having lost the tenderness that it was so full of moments ago, shatters something- I do not know what- inside of me. In a single, swooping gesture, brimming with a familiar flash of hatred, he gets out of his chair and leaves. I return to my monitor screen, which has finally lit up with, and check my assignments for the day. I manage to write a couple hundred words of a high fantasy story, the kind with gargoyles, ghosts and demons, blood-sucking parasites, etc, etc, when I get a message from Ahsan, and it reads,

'You know you can talk to me, right? We could watch the new movie that you were talking about.'

'I talk about a lot of movies.' I type back instantly. 'You have to be more specific.'

'The one with the girl who shoots fire out of her nostrils or something?'

I scoff. He's talking about the latest installment in the *Firechasers* series. My fingers type a message, correcting him, but something stops me before I can click 'send.'



*My father is dead.*

While I appreciate the sentiment, I do not know how to react to it. Here is a boy- a man, really- who seems capable of profound declarations of love and whatnot, the kind that would put the best romance authors to shame (Ahsan is also corny in a boring and predictable way, I know this because he once told me that his idea of a perfect date was to 'watch the sun set together') and yet all I can do is keep him in the dark. I leave the message on read, and close the application. Perhaps, it is better this way.

*My father is dead.*

During lunch, I think about the ways that I could tell Ahsan about *it*. I sit with my office friends, and let their chatter swirl around me. In the artifice of the bright, white light, I can see all the flaws on their faces amplified. Mehreen, who is nineteen and had to give up her dream of being a gynecologist for the sake of supporting her family financially, has a festering pimple in the crevice of her nose. Sumrah, who is around my age, and married to one of the managers on the upper floor, has a cavity on her front tooth. As they chatter and gossip, I find growing in myself a terrible desire to vanish. Here, in the ever-eternal daylight of watts and fuses, I am reminded over and over again of the hair on my knuckles, of the prickly skin underneath my trouser, and the ugliness of the foot that I've hid away inside my Sunday-bazaar sneakers. For the second time in the day, I am reminded of my hideousness, and like some sick song stuck on loop, my thoughts drift again. This time, I am not thinking about Ahsan, or the petrified expression of horror that he will wear when I tell him about the death of my father, but of my father himself.

Just like that, the old song starts playing again. The broken tune plays over and over, flooding my mind with visions of my dead father dancing to the beat of a Punjabi song. *Or was it a song in Urdu?* My mother watches from the distance, and although there are tiny bruises spattered on the nape of her neck, her smile is so bright and big, I lose sense of everything else. I laugh, giggle and clap, and it isn't long before my father takes me up in his big arms, and twirls me around the room. I lean against his chest, and feel as Belle would, wrapped up in the Beast's hairy arms. Another spin, and her smile grows bigger. One more, and it's leaking out of her cheeks now. I realize then and there that I love him. I giggle once more, and place my head on his chest, just as I had seen the other girls do at school with their fathers. I wonder, if I could call him Papa now, like the rest of them.

\*\*\*

I excuse myself from the company of my friends, and make my way to the parking lot, where I lean against a pillar, and for a moment, I relax against the solid sculpture of cement, covered by a thick sheen of shiny paint. For a few sweet seconds, nothing happens. If Ahsan could see me now, he'd probably smile at how relaxed I appeared. The air around me is light, and there is a lovely stillness all – I can't help but *be* relaxed. Before the knot in my stomach can fully untie itself, however, my phone rings. It is my mother. I answer immediately.

"Are you okay, Amma?" I inquire.

"Yes, yes, beta." She answers. "I just wanted to ask if you could come home early. We have to go furniture shopping today."

Last week, my mother had the peculiar idea of emptying the room that my father occupied- which after a year of knowing no human presence, had turned into a festering dung hole, with craters brimming with bedbugs and cockroaches- and turning it into a 'guest room.' The idea had caught me off-guard for a multitude of reasons. After my father's passing, our splintered home found itself in a strange position in the khandaani landscape. My mother and I would always be 'Sajid Saheb ki biwi aur beti,' but with the absence of the man himself, our relatives knew that the title meant nothing at all. Slowly, after the funeral, they scattered one by one, and besides a few text messages and calls, their presence was reduced to a notification on our phones. In other words, there were no guests to invite. Even if there were, there would always be the problem of money.

"Amma, can't we go tomorrow?"

"No, we can't. It's the least we can do to honor the memory of your father," my mother answers, and although I can't see her face, I imagine her nose scrunching up in anger.

"Fine, I'll do whatever you want," I say, and for a split second, I see the skin around her eye, blackened with blows, pleat itself into a crow's eye. In my imagination, her smile is too big for her face, and pours out of its tired contours, blending into the wallpaper. I make a mental note to use that image in one of my stories for work.

\*\*\*

I leave work as silently as I can, and having just finished a final chapter about a lone vampire, I feel myself strangely equipped for the task of evasion. Sneaking through the office, sticking to

the dark, I do my best to avoid running into Ahsan. I have still not answered his message, and after my mother's call, I lose the small crumbs of courage that I had plucked out of the stillness in parking lot where Ahsan could, but did not see me.

Once I reach home, Mama and I waste no time, and take a rickshaw to the nearest market, with the intention to splurge. Although neither of us have the heart to admit what has occurred between us, in the market, my mother and I slip quite easily into our designated roles. We do not talk about it, of course, but we've done it before. Amma forgets but I don't. That's my problem, I guess.

The transformation takes place. Daughter- Sluggish Accomplice alias Choti. Amma- Frugal Mastermind alias Munni. Between the two of us, there is charge, there is electricity- the same current of performance flows as it once did, when we would pretend that there were no shouts emanating from his room, that our house of hate and gall, was in fact a house of love and splendor; one in which cups were not smashed, bowls of curry not toppled over, where oil and blood did not stain, a house where love kept, a home in which life- *life!* - endured. I remember all the things that I played- Chor, Police Ariel, Gretel, Dulhan, Judging by the inhuman smile on her face, I guess Amma does too. But what do Munni and Choti want? Well, they're cheapskates, out in the open of the market. What do you think they want?

My phone vibrates in my pocket. I ignore it, and return to the scene of the market. Donkeys circle around stalls, paper draperies hang from the stalls, glass glitters on the floor. Hand in hand with my mother, I tipsy and turn, high on that current, that wild, wild stream of ions and charge. It does not matter that the man whose name we tarnish has long been gone, but in the hushed instructions that we exchange, I can feel a small change birthing. The world feels it too, and expands to make space, to envelop us in her arms. Shopkeepers welcome us, security guards let us pass through undeterred. Hand in hand, my mother and I scurry from one corner to the other, inciting in the confined spaces entire revolutions at the bargains that we've made. Other women glare at us with their kohl-rimmed eyes, envying our blaring audacity. In large, eloquent, voices, we choose the color of the velvet curtains, and burst into peals of girlish giggles when the shopkeeper shows us a particularly phallic vase.

I feel a distant vibration somewhere nearby, and feel the sweat pouring from my mother's palms into the pores on my grimy hands. There is a white light piercing through from somewhere, a shop- most likely. The light bares all, even the sly scent of popped corn laced under the

dominant one of the gutter. I see little buds of hair sprouting on my mother's upper lip, see, with stark clarity, patches of yellow on the new mattress that we had just picked out. I see too, the blood-red splotches of *paan* staining the shopkeeper's smile.

Quietly, I take a step back. Quietly, we leave.

*My father is dead.*

I think to myself as I clean the cobwebs on the window railings, and dust the fan. My mother, in a magnificent feat of strength lifts the mattress all on her own, and drags it to the dumpster on the ground floor of our building. I help her, and together we dismantle the bed frame, and unclip the crème curtains from the rusty rods. Just as stillness begins to settle in the new space, the sound of my phone's ringtone pierces through the air, vibrating maniacally on the countertop. I check, and it is Ahsan. I leave the room, and pick the call up,

"You didn't give me an answer. Do you want to watch the movie with me?" he asks. His voice is heavy, and I have to be honest with you, I'm tempted.

Possibilities flutter all around me.

*He doesn't even know the name of the movie. But I could teach him. I could whisper sweet nothings forever.*

Begrudgingly (*begrudgingly?*), I answer,

"What time is the show?"

## ***Denouement***

With this issue of The Falconer, we have opened the magazine up to new possibilities. A few important changes are adrift. Firstly, we have changed the design of the magazine by loosening our grip over the theme. It will still retain its place as the binding force, but in all future issues, there will be standalone pieces in addition to ones particular to the theme. In addition, we are now accepting submissions (poetry, short fiction, and non-fiction prose) from other departments. The magazine is still a project of the English Department, which is integral to its very identity, but opening up room for more literary activity in the faculty only seems befitting. We are also expanding our social media presence and making the magazine more accessible. Both the official Instagram and Facebook accounts are linked below. Most importantly, the official website for The Falconer will go live within a week. The website will serve as both an archive for all the past issues as well as the official platform for announcements and side projects. There are many other developments in the pipeline for the magazine, but all in due time.

I would like to welcome our newest team members, Maham Owais and Rubab Amir (1st Year, Morning). They are talented individuals that have brought with them a passionate change of air and renewed zeal. The future of the magazine at the department looks brighter with such students. I would also like to thank the rest of The Falconer team for their amazing work over the last two years that we have managed to keep this project afloat.

Thank you to the English Department for allowing us the space to continue doing what we love and the readers of the magazine that make the tiring process of putting out each issue absolutely worth it.

Best,

Moaz Ahmed

*Follow us on Instagram: @thefalconerku*

*Follow us on Facebook: @ku.thefalconer*

