

Visual Diary

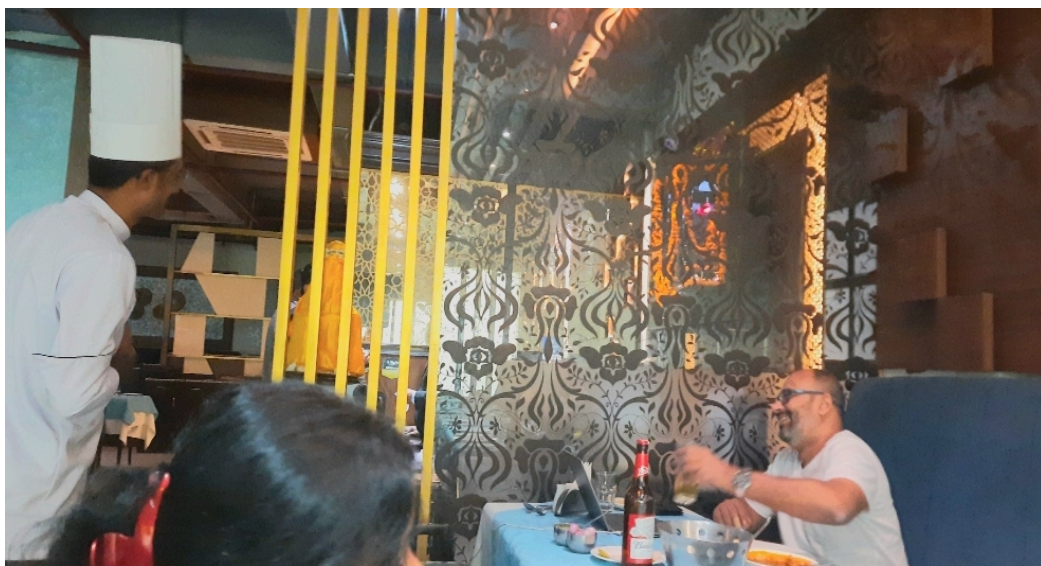
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4 November, 2022

6:14 PM

The Topsy Man

I'm at my favourite restaurant. A soft and exquisite composition of jazz music plays over the muffled chatter in the room. The



tangy aroma in the air kisses my nose and just for a moment, my problems drift away like the smoke from the sizzling appetizer on the table next to mine. From the corner of my eye, I can see a tipsy middle-aged man gobble his food down almost like a child. His gray side-burns and the highly discernible fatigue are in stark contrast with his actions. His big and prominent eyes remind me of a lobster's. The corners of lips twist into a smile, as he gulps down his drink. I can see his face painted by an emotion that I think is nostalgia, which he does not try to conceal. I start wondering if the taste of the food made him reminisce about his mother, or perhaps his grandmother. For an instance, it looks like the food washed away his weariness, because his face shows only utmost pleasure. I glance away from the man, and encounter a dull crowd of people. They look

like silhouettes fiddling with their food; everyone is existing, yet no one is living. I suddenly feel suffocated. I look back at the man, and he sparkles before my eyes. It seems like all the stars in the universe aligned just to watch him. And then it hits me - I don't have to drown in nihilism like most people in this world. I can choose to stand out like this man.

I see him call out to the waiter. His voice is deep-toned and distinct. A tall and petite waiter rushes to his table, his face etched with nervousness. I scoot over to the edge of my seat to eavesdrop on their conversation. My ears refuse to make out their words, but I see his wide smile return to his face as he points at the food and brushes his fingers against his chest, almost as if to say "your food has touched the core of my heart". I'd only ever known people for their negative critiques about the food and service, how often did you see people genuinely express their heart-felt reviews? The waiter returns the smile,

and I can see hints of both relief and amazement on his face. They exchange handshakes, and the man returns to his food, devouring every bite as if it's his last meal.

7 November, 2022
3:50 PM

The Girl in a Blue Dress

I am standing barefoot amidst a garden. An icy breeze caresses my face, making me flutter like a kite dancing in the wind. The soft, freshly cut grass tingles beneath my feet and I can hear a distant buzzing of bees. A musty scent, which smells like a collision of flowers, lingers in the air as I trance across the wet ground. The dew on the leaves look like emerald gemstones; it seems like the trees have flicked their branches at me almost like magic wands, entrapping me in a wonderland where butterflies waltz like fairies among the red roses and beetles laze about the mud like the buttons of a trench coat. In the course of my hypnosis, I encounter a girl, tall and pale, bedizened in a dress as blue as the sky glistening above. Her hazel-brown hair sway in the wind like a willow, as she turns to face me. The tint of brown in her eyes resembles a clutter of coffee beans. Her lips are dyed in red, a shade that highlights her velvety skin. I had seen her a couple of times before in the same place, strumming the strings of a guitar that always accompanied her, except today.



I am compelled to ask her about the missing instrument. Before the words can leave my mouth, she greets me with a smile so serene it almost lulls me to sleep. I return the smile, waving at her stiffly. She scurries towards me like a penguin and greets me with a simple yet sincere 'hello'. She points at my hair and mutters, “the top of your head looks like a palm tree”, which was not incorrect. I was diagnosed with an extraordinary case of ‘a bad hair day’, but I never anticipated her to be so blunt. Her smile is intermingled with a tinge of melancholy, which I am determined to probe into. As I launch my question, her smile ebbs away like the sun fading into twilight. She speaks of a peacock that dwelt in this very garden. She slides a photograph out of her wallet, and hands it to me. “This was my only friend, I named her Sufina.” Such a humane name could only be ascribed to something cherished with heart, I think to myself. I clench the thick and tattered photo and just a solitary glance at the picture spellbinds me into multicolored paradise. The bird in the picture is the epitome of beauty. The spectrum of colours stands out vividly, the blue bleeding into the green almost like watercolors on a canvas. “They took her away to a sanctuary,” she says, her eyes fixated on the sky that now looked as dull and bleak as her sullen face. I can feel a grip tightening around my heart, and a lump in my throat that aches profoundly.

Then, on the spur of the moment, a fickle sunlight curtains her face, as she gushes about her new pet cat, who is presently nameless. She promises to show her to me, and I make the additional request of wanting to be serenaded by her guitar someday. She giggles softly, and concurs to my peculiar demand. If I could fathom anything about the mystifying girl,

it was that her love for animals was bigger than the whole sky. "What about Skyler?," I ask. "Sky-ler," she repeats after me, looking up. "That's a nice name".

12 November, 2022
3:40 PM

The Tattooist

My friend wants to get a tattoo, so he dragged me in a lush tattoo parlour. As I step inside, the bell at top of the door chimes, a sound that is strangely comforting. Accompanied by the sound is a shy smile greeting us from the corner of the shop. It belongs to a slim and lean man. His eyes are thin and almond-shaped, and the sunlight piercing through the window makes his eyes look like pools of honey. He instantly rises from his chair and bows before us, catching both my friend and I off guard. We awkwardly bow back, exchanging comical glances. I am specifically moved by this gesture of the tattooist, for it seems rare and graceful. I fail to recall the time I was last bowed to before.

Hangings of tattoo designs that depict butterflies, lilies, roses and eerie mascots embellish the walls of the parlour. He looks at me with his sharp gaze, and asks if I'm here to "get inked".

His voice is dulcet and low, and it reminds of a calm, cascading waterfall. I laugh at this terminology, and his face shows a slight satisfaction. I gently shake my head and point at my friend, who is then seated. There is a slightly overpowering smell of chemicals gushing from his workplace, which makes me ask him if he's used to an environment like such. He shrugs shyly, and says that it is his passion that tells him to do so. He constantly avoids looking into my eyes, and from this I gather the introversion of his nature, a quality almost endearing to observe.



He wipes my friend's arm clean with a disinfectant. I notice his long and slender fingers as he moves the tattoo machine across my friend's arm. His face illustrates a concentration so mystifying that I feel myself getting lost in his artistry. To him, my friend's skin is a canvas, a tapestry that he can paint with his

skills. I ask him how long he's been doing this job, and he responds with, "7 years", not diverting his eyes from his work. I throw more questions at him, and he answers each one patiently with a grin.

What I learn by the end of the session is that he comes from Nepal, and hates the winter there. His passion to draw and sketch comes from his grandfather, who has a pillar of awards from his younger days, bestowed upon him for his mastery in painting. He points at a picture of an old, wrinkly man at the

table, and for the first time, looks into my eyes and says, “he still lives on in every tattoo I draw.”

20 November 2022
12:40 PM

The Calligrapher

I am alighting off a bus in Delhi. The infuriating honks reverberate throughout the city, but the chatter of my classmates fills the air with exhilaration. I can see faint clouds of exhaust fumes spewed out by the cars passing by, each on their own journey. A clutter of little kids dash across the road, chasing after a scrawny man peddling balloons by the footpath. Our professor hollers to us, and we excitedly gather around. Upon receiving some simple instructions, we form groups and scatter into the festival like a swarm of bees. The Urdu festival was the talk of town, everyone dreamed of attending it. I walk through



the front gate, and the miscellany of colours at the festival pulls me away from reality.

Unnoticed by my friends, I drift away from my group like a lost dandelion, and my eyes frantically scan the place,

stopping at a stall which stands out the most. Hangings of bejewelled calligraphy embellish the stall, making me question if I'd just wandered into a fairy tale wonderland. I move closer, and notice a man, in his thirties or early forties slouched at his desk, intricately carving calligraphy on an antique pen. I lean in to catch a glimpse of his work. The pen was adorned with Urdu words and phrases, something I couldn't decipher, but the elegance of his calligraphy made it certain that it meant something consequential. His eyes, obscured behind his oval glasses are focused on his work with a resolve and passion I can only ever hope to attain someday. His steady, sleek fingers were bound by artistry. I fail to take my gaze off him. The zest with which his hands move rings the bell of ardour in my mind, and I want to keep watching him forevermore.

27 November, 2022
8:45 PM

The Cosmic Child

I have always been fond of my brother. His life revolves around astronomy, so I like to refer to him as the ‘cosmic child’. It is a chilly night in late November, and we find ourselves in a gathering our father was invited to. I heave a deep sigh, and I can see my own breath in the winter air. Everyone around us is wrapped in mittens and coats, a striking resemblance to polar bears. My brother pulls at my arm as we walk in through the main entrance. “Look, Look!”, he exclaims, pointing at the abundance of lights and tinsels around the place. It looks like everything is enveloped by a blanket of multicolored lights, almost like sadness has never touched this place, almost like a stellar explosion.



I glance at my brother, who seems overly mesmerized by the hangings of lights in the shapes of stars, moon, and other celestial entities. His face is lit up by pure ecstasy more than the brightness of the lights. He rummages through his backpack, and frantically starts snapping photos with his camera, I know he wants to treasure this moment for his whole life. He takes off his coat, and it seems almost like the cold doesn't perturb him in his exuberance. Next, he pulls out his sketchbook, flips through the pages, and starts gliding his pencil across the ember-coloured pages of the notebook. "I want to capture this moment in every way I can", he tells me, his eyes not leaving the page he is doodling in. His love for the universe is unparalleled.

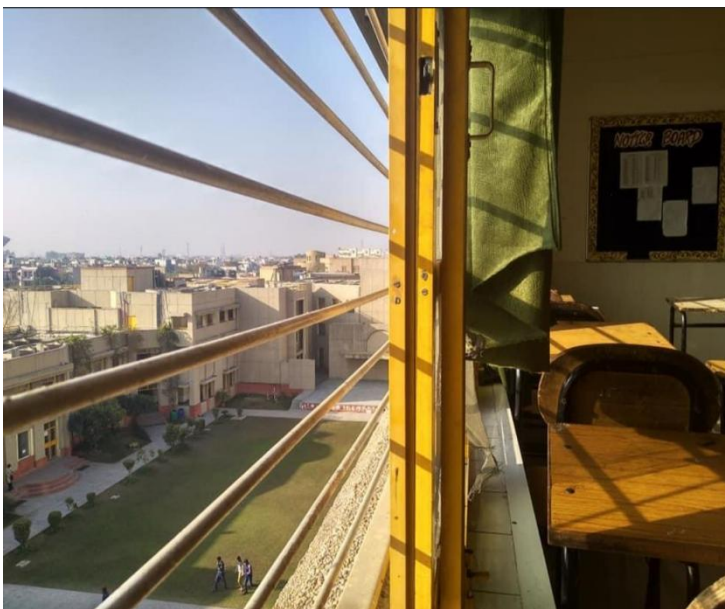
1 December, 2022
4:58 PM

The Forlorn School



With a wavering heart, I stand before a place that painted every fragment of my childhood in gold - my old school. The security guard smiles faintly as I mention the purpose of my visit, 'alumni meet'. The lofty old building stands tall and unchanged. From the corner of my eye, I espy the ginormous tree proclaimed to be the haven of our school. As the years drifted by, it became the abode of leisure for anyone seeking its shade. As I draw near to the tree, I catch a whiff of freshly cut grass nearby. Standing inches away from the tree, I can now see faint discoloration, a shade of yellow seeping into the leaves. Something stings inside me, and before the emotions can cascade out of my heart, I look away.

I enter the building, and see a cluster of middle-school kids strolling about the hallways. For a split second, I see a glimpse of my 14-year-old silhouette, loitering around these very corridors aimlessly. I can feel the strings of nostalgia hovering over my skin. The hallways that once looked so broad and welcoming now seem so inexplicably compact and unfamiliar. As I cross the threshold of one of my old classrooms, I notice how the shabby, amber walls have been repainted with the brightest white I'd ever seen, almost like the walls had been adorned with pearls. Yet, they somehow looked more ashen than before. The empty, sepia desks are lined up in an orderly way, but the goofy engravings on the wood fail to exhibit the disciplinary essence of a classroom. I smile to myself, reminiscing. I remember how the engravings were the artworks of none other than my own classmates.



I shift my gaze to the most distinct attraction of the room - the blackboard. Covered in faint traces of chalk

marks, it reminds me of all the math lessons I could never wrap my head around and all the doodling we did behind the teacher's back. The flecks of warm sunlight piercing through the window serve as a reminder that evening has fallen. I watch the bleachers of the playground from the window, crimson red in colour. In the back of my mind, I can still hear the screams and cheers that filled the football ground during critical matches. Maybe the deep, red tones of those shabby bleachers enkindled our emotions back in the day.

6 December, 2022
11:02 AM

The Mystical Garden



The dulcet chirping of birds is melodic and sweet. This gardenscape reminds me of a dreamland I saw in my dreams one day. The misty smell of grass wakes me up entirely, as a faint ray of sunlight blankets my face. The park seems empty, and I feel a sense of satisfaction cascading through my body. The solitary bench at the corner sits alone in this bitter cold, and I realize now that is the bearer of a thousand secrets and a million conversations. The intricate engravings at the side of the bench stand out to me the most, making it look like a relic of the past. I drag my fingers across the cold metal, and it sends a chill down my spine. Peacocks often pay visits to this region of my locality, and today just so happens to be my lucky day. A peacock, bedizened with the hues of emerald and sapphire stands peacefully near the bench, and I am lost in a trance by the beauty it holds. It spreads its feathers, and it looks like a display of the brightest fireworks known to humankind. A flock of birds flutter their wings beside me and perch at the armrest of the bench, almost as if to roister and the enjoy the show. I smile to myself, and freeze like a statue, wishing I could somehow be one with nature.

17 December, 2022
1:30 PM

The Scenic View

The gushing of waves is tranquilizing. It spellbinds me thoroughly, and for a moment, the voices of my family members fail to reach my ears. Time comes to a standstill, and I turn to my thoughts. Taking off my shoes and socks, I step into the river. The icy water engulfs my body with



goosebumps. I bend down to see millions of tiny rocks and stones, each a unique colour, almost as if they were painted by the angels in paradise. To remember my journey, I shove my hand in the chilling water and grab a handful of them and stuff them safely into my backpack. I glance up at the overlooking mountains that stand tall like guardians of the place.

The thought alone puts a smile to my face. the flowers blooming

in every corner of the mountain look like little flags, swaying in the wind proudly for their beloved river. The trees rustle their leaves as butterflies dance with the wind. Even though my family and I come here almost every year, this place never fails to amaze me, the quietude it bestows is absolutely unparalleled. The green of the mountain meets with the azure of the sky, making it look like a big gate to heaven.