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SEIRIDIUM

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For the breeze is long gone
The selfishness we rely on
I’m not responsible for the crimes I commit
Because I’m just the wind that blows

I’m not responsible for the crimes I commit
I’m just the wind that blows
I carry the fragrance of my past
Of my forefathers who planted the souls

I have crossed the seas
I had crossed the mountains
The moment I couldn’t seize
I tend to complain often

The breeze is long gone
The selfishness we rely on
In love is disowned
So the storm is now upon

A king once hailed
The flag raised high above
The men stood along the foot
A fleet to save the world

Thirst choked the windpipes
The warzone punctured the maps
A breeze shall carry a dove
With dust did it lose its whiteness

The mothers are killed
And the daughters are raped
Dissenting to what is believed
For shelter they are serried

I hear the hopelessness
The drums and thuds
The birth itself a curse
Women, waste as it goes

This aching goes past the chest
Struck in the arteries
My sister is seeking for help
In which I am mediating

All those acres vented and deskilled
That smoked the rainy clouds
Suffixed to the core of capitalism
Sufferings are mere enjoyments

For the breeze is long gone
The selfishness we rely on
I’m not responsible for the crimes I commit
Because I’m just the wind that blows



STUCK IN THE INBETWEEN

She knew that heaven exists. Well, maybe not the traditional heaven, but an afterlife, at least. She knew this fact as if her bones had been soaked with this knowledge since the beginning of her existence. She knew this fact as if the highest being told it to her itself.
Yet, she was not there yet. She was dead, certainly, but she was not yet in the afterlife paradise dubbed as heaven.
So, you might be asking: where was she?
If you were to ask her, she wouldn't be able to reply you, for she had no idea where she was. She had never experienced anything quite like this improper afterlife. She could see nothing, feel no physical touch, nor could she hear anything apart from her own thoughts echoing in her head.
It could be the afterlife, but she knew it wasn't. She just knew.
(She hoped)
But if she wasn't in the afterlife, then where was she? She would call it 'nowhere', but she was somewhere. She had to be somewhere. If not, she wouldn't be existing.
One thing she was sure of, though, was that she was stuck in this in-between with no knowledge on how to get to the other side.
What was she to do but think?

She remembered the day her father left the family.
They had been laughing over a television programme as her mother cooked in the kitchen. It would be the last of such nights she would ever have.
She remembered the way her father held her in his arms as she sat on his lap, pointing at the screen in excitement whenever something funny happened. She never really understood what was happening on screen, just that it tickled her; and in turn, it tickled her father, whose laughs were like bubbles popping and visits to the candy store.
She remembered turning towards her father to comment about something a character said, excitement bubbling in her, only to die away in an instant.
In that moment, as her smile froze on her cheeks, her world of laughter and light-heartedness was broken down with the front door, drowning her in fear.
She remembered screaming and crying as her mother held onto her, fingernails digging into her skin as she was forced to stay still and watch her father get slammed against the wall. She remembered the recognition that flickered through her at the metal cuffs the police locked around his wrist. She remembered thoughts whirling through her mind as she, at only age five, tried to wrap her mind around the fact that her father was being arrested; that he could be a criminal.
She remembered the regretful look he sent her way as he looked back at her one last time, just as his head was forced into the car.
She remembered how time seemed to stop, the flashing lights of the police sirens stilling as their eyes met, silent apologies spilling from his and confusion spilling from hers.
And she remembered breaking free of her mother's grasp to run after the car as it sped away, only to fall onto her knees and bleed. She remembered how every tear seemed to burn her skin; useless and a sign of her weakness.
That was the first time she experienced such helplessness, and God would be damned if it were the last time.

She remembered that feeling of helplessness plaguing her as she grew. Her father's absence was, try as she might, a void that she just couldn't fill. Her presence in the world was too small; too small to grow into the empty space her father had left with his first step out of the house. She was too small and just not enough for her mother.
She remembered how quiet the house was the first few months after her father's arrest. At first it was a contemplative silence; it wasn't confirmed that the police had concrete evidence against her father, and it was unsure if he would be freed or convicted with the murder of his father.
Her mother moved around the house with a burden that she never had before. Her mother's once carefree life was destroyed and she had to spend those few uncertain months of her life wondering what to do next.
She knew what her mother was thinking.
Would her father come back? Would her mother have to provide for her alone? Was it stupid of her to hope?
She remembered the day the news came. She remembered the way her mother's hand dropped to the side, her tears falling to the ground with more life than she had in her hand that remained still, as if shocked to paralysation.
She remembered walking up to her mother, hugging her leg and hoping that her tiny body would be enough to piece back the heart of her mother that she swore she could hear breaking. She remembered the way her mother had simply brushed her away, locking herself in her room for the rest of her day.
And she remembered how she re-emerged a different person; a crazed look in her eyes, going straight for the liquor stash her father had stocked up for special events.

She remembered the day she left her mother. She remembered the feeling of freedom as she took the first step out the front door, luggage in hand.
It was probably the total opposite of what her father, then dead (a heart attack in prison), felt all those years ago.
Her mother had only grown worse over the years. No longer was she the mother who cooked and taught her child songs on the piano.
Instead, her mother became an Addict; disgustingly addicted to alcohol, drugs, and gambling. The piano from which sweet music used to fly from was destroyed in a fit of rage after her mother, crazed with grief from her husband's death and alcohol induced, smashed it with a chair until it splintered and broke.
As she took that first step out of the door, she felt herself leaving all these behind her.
She didn't look back, not even when she heard her mother, voice wracked with sobs, begging her to stay back. She did not even have to force herself to look forward; the last thing she wanted to do was look back on the mother that had failed her time and time again.
She kept on walking, not knowing that that freedom was going to pay.

She regretted a lot of things in life.
She regretted being so weak; no backbone and no ability to do anything for those she loved.
But she could do something now.
She could go and see them; her mother and father.
She could get out of this place and apologise for everything she had done and everything she did not do.
She just had to get out of this place.
But she couldn't.
She was stuck.
As helpless in death as she was alive.





She remembered the first day she visited her mother since she left. The travel to the cemetery was uncomfortable, with old neighbours shooting her disapproving looks.
She remembered wanting to lash out at them. She remembered wanting to ask them if they knew about the abuse she received at the hands of the one she was about to visit.
She wanted to ask them if they have ever stayed in school as long as they could so as to avoid their mother at all costs.
She wanted to ask them whether she could really be blamed for not being able to bring herself to visit her mother until a year after the latter's death.
She wanted to ask what they knew. She wanted to ask who exactly they were to judge her.
She remembered standing in front of her mother's grave, tears falling from her face as she remembered not the bad, but the good moments they shared.
She remembered every deliberately unanswered phone call and every curt reply she gave her mother should the ringing of the phone get too much.
She remembered the feeling of regret, and how she could do nothing to bring her mother back.

Terri Kue
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STUCK IN THE INBETWEEN

FINDING my SOULMATE

The more I didn't want to get attached, the more I didn't want to think about him leaving, the more my fear and anxiety was repressed, and came out all of a sudden at such a random time that I believed I was going crazy. My heart dropped, my stomach felt empty, void, and I couldn't swallow due to the huge ball stuck in my throat. I later realized that my fear of abandonment from when I was younger was coming up. I had no control. I couldn't rationalize my reaction, nor could I explain my thoughts or emotions to him. Not yet, at least. I tried after, but stopped myself when tears started running down my face, at which point he just took me in his arms and held me, allowing the stream of tears to flow down my face. That's when I realized I wasn't allowing myself to feel scared. But the fear came out anyway.

I knew from the start that he was going to leave. I didn't get attached. I was present with him. Always in the moment, enjoying our time together, no matter what we did. I never felt worried with him. I never thought about my past with him. The connection was undeniable. Unexplainable. The safety he provided me with was something I've never felt before. And when I allowed the thought that he would leave back home enter my mind, my heart just dropped.

The only thing I could do was pick it up gently, and acknowledge this fear. Acknowledge the overwhelming darkness I felt while imagining him gone. So I trust that even when he goes, he will not leave my life. It is the only thing I can hope. The only belief that will settle my mind and heart.

A lot of people have left in my life, for various reasons. Sometimes I cut them off for my own good, some of them left without so much as a glance back. Those were the people that meant the most to me, at least at that time. But everything happens for a reason. And I know he came into my life for a reason. To show me that safety, and freedom, is possible. To show me what it feels to be completely in sync with someone, together as one, and truly in the moment.

I believe that he will stay in my life. We speak the same language. We let each other breathe, and grow, all while nurturing each other. So even though we will be an ocean apart, I know I will still feel him by me. I will forever hold the lessons he brought me, and cherish the connection and relationship we have. A peaceful, understanding, playful, and gentle relationship. One where my inner-child comes out and feels nurtured and comforted. One where we can discuss anything and everything with no judgment. Where I can feel infinite and calm simultaneously.

Everything happens for a reason. Everyone comes into your life to teach you a lesson. Although some people may walk with you on your journey for longer, they are all put on your path for a reason.

I believe we have different soulmates throughout our life. He is my soulmate, of that I am sure. Friend or romantic soulmate, I am not sure of yet. But I am okay with not knowing. With not putting any pressure on this connection. Just letting it be, and believing it will continue to flourish and live through the physical distance to come.

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A lot of people have left in my life, for various reasons. Sometimes I cut them off for my own good, some of them left without so much as a glance back. Those were the people that meant the most to me, at least at that time.



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WAGNER IN SEATTLE

My father sleeps with an atlas,
each night a vacation
to the Seattle opera
where melody becomes his religion
changing prayers of light
to soft, tenor cadences.
His bones thirst for Wagner
Ring Of The Nibelungen
rattling the keyholes of a dream---
lost in the splintered teeth
of Montana mountains
he hears a symphony of light
knitting the road ahead.

Marcia kester Doyle | USA
@menopausalmother

SUICIDE ON THE MIND

Is it wise to criticize
Someone who has suicide on their mind?
No, I didn't think so.
Then why do you keep on doing it?
You dig them this hole,
that just keeps getting bigger and bigger.
Every time you call them:
Stupid, nerd, loser, ugly, hoe.
The victims of this name calling slit their wrists
No one's ever taught them better.
And they were too scared to ask for help
Since the fear of being laughed at
Is greater than the fear of dying.
One day they think the only escape is too:
Swallow a bottle of pills
Dangle from a rope
Drown in water
Or drown in the pool of blood that surrounds their body.
They never knew the life that they could've had
And maybe this was their fate.
But instead of leaving a legacy,
They will become another statistic
That's soon to be forgotten.
And finally everyone realizes the wrongs they did to these victims
But it's too late to unwind the past from its hate.
Now you've been warned
Never to call anyone:
Stupid, nerd, loser, ugly, hoe.
Because they think the only escape is to kill themselves.



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BROKEN DOLL

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"I'm too old to start again", I told the keeper as I came out of the dilapidated gate of the Hexgrove jail.
"You'll do just fine", he waved at me reassuringly.
It has been twenty years since I've seen Bianca and my daughter. Several thoughts of them had given me sleepless nights in the jail but most of them were about Bianca. I am too old to start again, I know.
I saw a girl and assumed it to be Suzy stepping out the old grey Lancia in the mid-afternoon. The wind blew real strong, almost taking me thirty years back to when I had met my wife who now Suzy resembled. 'She was beautiful. The word can't alone describe how she took my breathe away at first sight. We worked for the same company and eventually fell in love. Bia was an independent woman. We could not live with my family or hers after marriage and that is why we moved into a city apartment of her choice.' The wind still blew hard on my face, and the pictures of my memories with her flickered so vividly in the mid-daylight.
"Daddy? We can't be late."
I knew I had to keep going. The car started moving and I noticed that we had a new driver now. Nothing inside the car had changed but I noticed that the broken doll was still kept in the seat's pouch.
'"You can't always have what you demand for" I told Bianca the day she demanded that she wanted to move into a brand-new house. "You are an adamant rat, Caleb" she shook her head in dismay. "You know what? I am done with this. I shall move into my own space before I give birth, you'll see". The argument worsened when her words reinforced and cut me like sharp objects at a length. We have always had arguments but just that day, it was extreme. She started throwing whatever she could find near her at me, snapping all the patience I had maintained at that point and I threw what was near me, at her- not realizing that what I threw was a knife. Utter fear crept into my head, when I noticed blood ooze out of a cut made on her forehead. "You devilish cad!" she cried holding her head, trying to stop the bleeding from her forehead. I did not mean to, I really did not. But it was too late before I could explain anything. My hands were cuffed behind my back and I was dragged into prison. That was when I took a last look at the mess I'd made; Bianca standing there, bleeding in pain, clutching her favourite doll that had also broken in the feud.'
The car stopped at a place that looked very gloomy. The atmosphere created a lonely feel to the place.
"Why have we stopped here?" I asked Suzy, still trying to figure out where we were at.
"Walk with me dad, I'll tell you" she told me and we walked together through what looked like a sombre forest. As we passed through tall trees, we reached an area, a place I did not want to see after twenty years of isolation in prison. I looked at Suzy who stood there with her eyes drenched with tears for an explanation. She stood quiet and held my hand, walking me to a tomb that read-

Bianca Reid
25.11.1963 - 12.05.2016

I wished for it to be a bad dream. A dream I would not even want to talk about the next day, but Suzy held my hand tight.
"She told me a lot about you, dad. She showed me many pictures of your happy memories together. Mommy never married another man. The day you were arrested, she told me, she numbed her love cells so she will never love anybody after you. When I was born, she had moved into a new house and waited so long that you'd come meet her again and she would forgive you and live a happy little family. We did not visit you at prison because mommy told me we'll wait until you come home to see us. She joked that you loved her egoistic nature. Only a year ago, she was diagnosed with leukaemia and too soon she left us."
This was not happening. "Why did nobody tell me this?" I cried. "Your mommy was an angel. We have always had arguments but she had her ways to reconcile. But what have I done", I cried again until I felt my throat dry. I wanted to stay with Bianca. Too old to start again but I knew I could start good and change this horrible ending a happy ending for her.
Suzy walked me back to the car. She was a replica of Bianca. My wife was gone long before I could propitiate her but she had left behind someone I could live the few remaining years of my life for, in her memory.
As we got back into the car, we remained in a prolonged silence. My heart felt heavy, heavier than it was when I lived in prison with guilt and extreme melancholy. "This one's for you, dad", Suzy handed me the broken doll. "Mommy left everything behind for us, but this doll she told me should belong with you.""But why? Why this?" I questioned her, although I knew it was Bianca's favourite doll.
"I asked her the same question, dad. I asked her why the broken doll out of all her possessions and she said, it's a metaphor. She told me 'if your daddy understands this, then I will have him forgiven."
I took the broken doll to my hand. At first sight I recalled the bitter memory of our last dispute but then I comprehended the important lesson the love of my life had left behind for me; that, when our favourite thing is broken, we don't throw it away. Instead, we still keep it, show extra concern about it and treasure it - cause after all, it has been something we loved, even though for a very short period out of an eternity.

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LOVE SHACKLES

a villanelle

We're joined by an invisible chain.
We try and fail to pull apart;
each link is forged of joy and pain.

Emotions overcame my brain.
Hopelessly smitten at the start,
we're joined by an invisible chain

that weighs so little. Yet in vain
I try to free my restless heart.
Each link is forged of joy and pain.

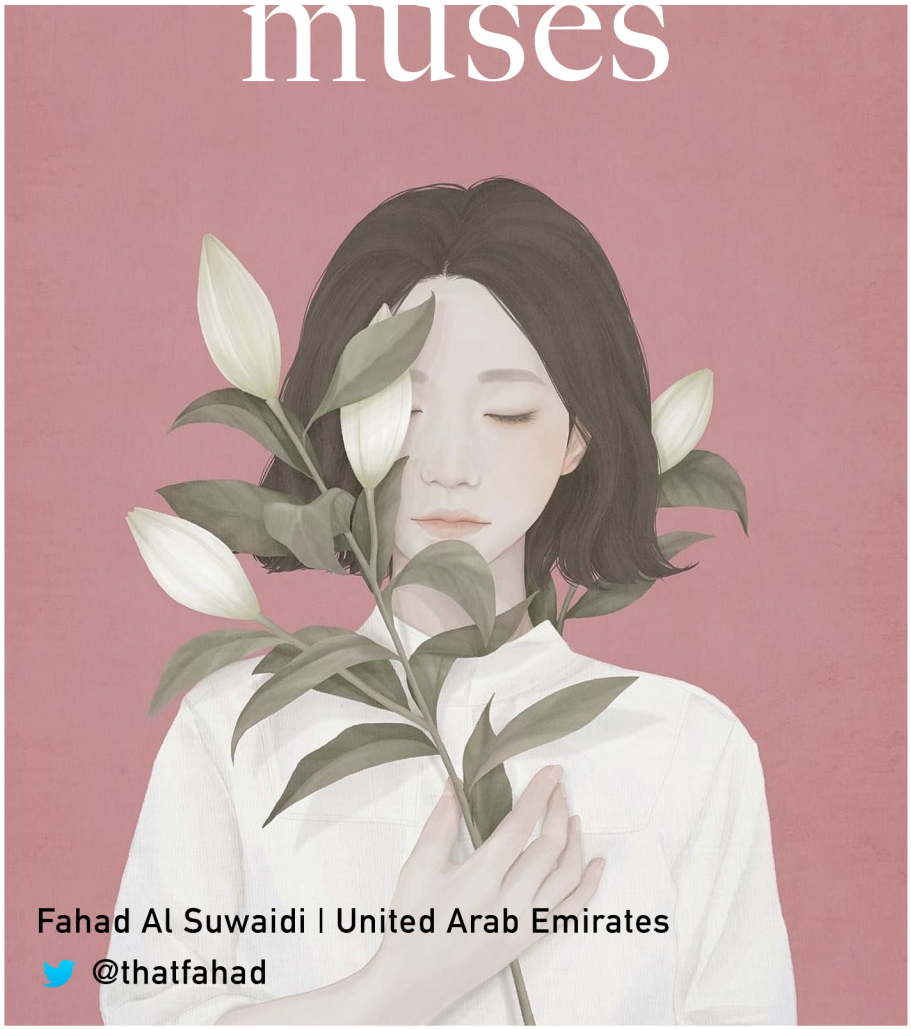
What is the use if I complain
about this fate I can't outsmart?
We're joined by an invisible chain.

Let's tally up the loss and gain
of taking Cupid's poisoned dart.
Each link is forged of joy and pain

so here we are, and must remain.
We wait until death do us part.
We're joined by an invisible chain,
each link is forged of joy and pain.

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muses



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She has Cleopatra's eyes
The crease of black kohl never lies
No one can mirror the enchanting re-
prise
of those desert eyes, the twins of
Gemini
Reputed to never cry
Their pupils clear skies
And leave no compromise.
A witness to her beauty, Nefertiti is in
her disguise.
To her utopian figure I sigh
In this everlasting high.
Even Medusa admires her glare,
The oriental nightfall flare
Her beauty of antiquity has no heir,
To which Artemis knows she is rare
Unsurpassed,

The alphabet leaves the best for last:
A model for a geisha,
Z for Zaina

LETTERS

I used to feel anxious every time a letter or two got delivered in my mother's mail, not because of the sender, but because of the receiver, my mother.
My mother worked as a bank accountant, she never lacked money. In fact, the only thing she always lacked was a new accessory every week, and sometimes it could be every a couple of days, due to her feeling of solitude and self-care.
I don't blame her. I mean, after my father died in the war, everything changed for her. Everything changed for us, we didn't go swimming anymore, we didn't drive in the green fields for hours anymore, and we didn't go fishing again.
But I think I recall his bequest to her before he left the house. She laid her head on his chest at the front door. He held a backpack and another bigger one was near his feet. I'm not sure if I saw tears drop down from her popped-out eyes, but I'm sure he was very reluctant to leave.
"I love you Vita, I'll always do. Take care of Rudolph."
That was it. He was out of our physical life since then.
The first week of his absence passed quietly with my mother wiping a lonely tear escpaing her eye, and me hiding in my messy room, trying to forget what time will he be home, and sometimes trying to remember if he even mentioned it at all.
She had received a letter, and then she dropped another tear, holding the letter in her right hand and the coffee mug in her left. Heat radiating from the fancy furnace she had bought, caressing her face and warming the room.
"Rudy," she said, gradually raising up her voice. "It's your dad!"
I was so naive, looking at myself leave the room in intense enthusiasm and run down the stairs. Yes, I was disappointed to find her holding the letter, smiling with tears, because I thought I would be seeing him, not her.
That afternoon was the only day she actually had a conversation with me. That night, after she had poured out all of her memories with my father, on the honeymoon, the international concerts, the world tours they enjoyed together —she read the letter in her hands.
"He says:
Dear Vita and Rudolph,
I hope you're doing well. I want you to know that I'm doing really great. The enemy lines are backing off as we're making a huge progress on the way. I have been missing you both, and I can't wait to come home and be with you.
I'll be back soon, Rudolph. Enjoy your company with your mother for now.
—Love, Dad "

She said the last words and put it aside, as if she restarted the crying process again. I smiled and stared at her before she grabbed my body and gave me a hug. It was cool, warm and saddening.
Three weeks passed, and I stayed in my room the whole time; looking down the window to see my mother scrub the snow off the car's windshield in the morning, and glancing across the window to see the mailman carefully put an envelope inside the mailbox, and then looking down again to see my mother park her car, then glancing again to see her pick the envelope out of the box.

I ran downstairs and sat on the warm couch, and I watched her take off her coat, gloves, and put down her gold-labelled purse, then accelerate to her office on the end of the hallway, right where I could see her desk. She sat down and opened the envelope. Her eyes went left and right, reading every letter carefully, sighing in relief and some kind of fury. I waited her to call me, tell me it's my dad again, and reassure me that everything was fine, that he was coming home. But that never happened.
She walked around the house without paying attention to my presence, just like I wasn't there at all. As if my father hadn't said "Take care of Rudolph."
But I was alright, I didn't need anything special from her. I just wished my father returned faster than he thought he would.
Five weeks passed silently, I thought maybe she forgot his words, maybe she thought I went with my father, maybe she thought I'm not home, it's fine. The mailman came back and forth our lawn, pushing the envelopes inside the mailbox every couple of days, and I saw her take them out, read them silently at her desk, and leave for work the next morning.

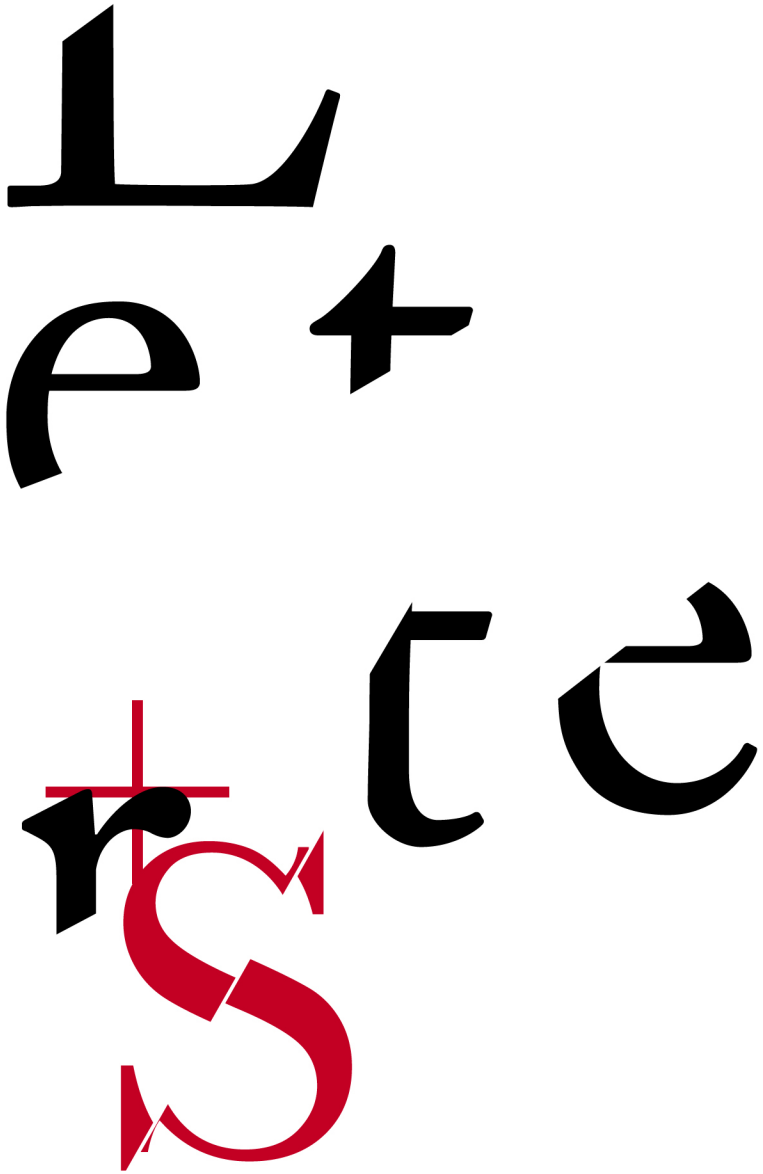
I had enough.
"Anything from dad?" I asked as she exited her office, a day she had came earlier than ever. She gave me a surprised look, then nodded, quite hesitantly.
"Yes, he says he's fine, and he'll come back soon."
That's it? That's all he said? I couldn't doubt her answers, because I've read books about wars and battles, I know that it's frustrating for families to keep waiting for their loved ones, and I know I shouldn't doubt her, not with our sad situation.
But I couldn't help myself from going to her office, in the end of the hallway. It was locked. Why did she lock the door to her office? I didn't steal bank papers, and the windows in it were really big anyone could have access to everything inside with just a small rock.
I tried opening the door every morning after she left, and I tried searching for a spare key I knew she hid somewhere but didn't find anything. I was frustrated, and I needed to know something about my father.
Was she trying to protect me from the heartbreaking and saddening truth of paternal death? Was she scared to tell me my father had died in the war against the terrorists?
My life was falling apart, at least from my perspective; when did one's life actually fall apart from other people's perspectives? That's the point.
The letters didn't stop coming, and my mom didn't stop reading them. It was very irritating and almost got under my skin, but I tried to be as patient as my body could offer.

Days after that, I went to the backyard of our house, the windows were very big I could see the whole office through them, I thought of a way I could get through them to her desk. I looked down at my feet, where snow had piled up in glorious shapes, pyramids and ant hills. The snow covered the rock covering the humid sand. And I shook my head in total disagreement to what my mind was suggesting.
There was me, sitting in her office, looking back at half of the glass window, clearly open and inviting. The wind blew all the papers sitting in the corners, and the glass slapped down the piles of files under it. And I was in trouble. Unless...
I started searching for a hint, a letter, a pen, an envelope, or even just any paper on her desk. There was nothing, and she was going to enter the house at any moment.
The office had a simplistic design, and a very inviting aroma. I had to do something to indicate that it wasn't me, and that's where my excellence played. The door, I scratched with the rock, I threw handfuls of snow across the office, on the desk and on the mat. Next, I went to the bathroom, got the blades my father had been keeping in the drawer, and I made a cut on my face, as if I dodged a knife. And then she knocked on the unlocked door.
A few minutes passed before she opened the door, looking around the living room, and then on to the side of her office.

"Rudy?" she yelled, "Rudolph!"
I lied down on the circular mat at the end of the staircase, and took my time before I answered with a crackled voice.
"Mom!" I yelled back when she approached me.
There she panicked, her eyes widened like never before, her face turned red and looked like it was about to explode. Her hands gestured anxiety and fear, and worry, about me, the house, the wind blowing on her neck, coming from her office, and the probably stolen papers.
I explained not what happened. It was a theft. And probably was our turn in the weekly burglary in our district. That's what I believed she thought.
"Could you be having important papers in your office?" I asked, sitting in front of the kitchen table, two days after the incident.
She stared at the kitchen wall, leaning on the countertop, and holding the coffee cup in both of her hands. She took some time to process my question into her head. "Nope."
"What's with my dad?" I asked right away, not paying attention to her answer. "Did he send any letters? It's been weeks."
And then I knew. I knew that my father had died. He died in her mind. He wasn't physically dead, but she believed he wasn't going to return. Her eyes spoke with unbearable frustration, and her stare at the bricks on the wall said that she didn't want to remember. Two months were enough for her to forget.
But I didn't, and I never will.
She knew for sure, not with the slightest doubt, that it was me who did it all. She knew I missed my life, but she also seemingly did too.

"

The letters didn't stop coming, and my mom didn't stop reading them.



Tariq Gharra
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Freezing memories, wrapped and sealed,
Of long summers, mud and sweat.
Waking in grey and lost in bricks
Grey and bricks, bricks and grey.
Asphalt, sidewalks, and streets
all strangers to the threading feet.
For, home, is far away.

A tongue that twists
Deceiving and failing
Ears that strain to
Catch that last syllable,
Smile and grimace
One and the same.
For home is far way.
Yearning for days,
Sore, sodden and happy.
But home...is far away.

Smooth journeys whisper
dying threats and dead dreams.
Home is far away.
In the shell of all things good
Perfumed cushions fail to keep you safe.
Mud and sweat and long summers.
For home..is far away.

Swirling under a sun that deceives
Forgotten seeds of pleasure
Whither away.
Mud and sweat
And long summers.
A mind trapped, a heart murdered.
And a body buried, knowing not
The deceit of it all,
For, home is far away,
And home, is lost.

LAPSE



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the SHAPE of WRITING

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With dry hands, she handed over the phone.
"Read this."
It was the kind of voice that the ear follows up and down, as if each speech is an arrangement of notes that will never be played again.
"It's pretty," I said.
"Yeah, but can you imagine it?"
"What do you mean?"
"I can't. The description lays down a frame of the voice's characteristics, but I've never heard a voice 'that the ear follows up and down,' and though I can hear a high pitched, feminine voice in my mind, it lacks the sort of musical quality that the passage suggests."
She continued, "You can imagine the sound, but at the same time you can't. It's right on that fence, between something you've experienced and another surreal world. Like a color outside the visible spectrum. You know what a color is, and you can picture other colors, but how can you picture this particular color, something you've never seen before?"
I thought a while. She was right. I didn't have an exact pitch and breathiness of the voice. Rather, I had a vague idea of the voice's texture, but not the actual voice itself. An amorphous abstraction. It was a form without much shape. More of a framework, or an outline. Enough to proceed on with the story without getting bogged down by too much detail.
"But that's not unique to writing." I whipped out my own phone, and pulled up a drawing of a boy playing piano. The audience listening were drawn with faces of awe. It seemed the sounds he was producing were of some other world.
"In my head, there's a vague wisp of what the crowd must be hearing, but I can't imagine the actual tunes."
"What they are experiencing seems too grand, looks too magical. I like to imagine that his piano playing is beyond my imagination. If you tried to show me the actual song, it would fall short of expectation, I guarantee you."
At this her gaze turned up, as if in thought, before returning to meet my own.
"I think it's different with writing, though, because, at least, with drawing, you experience the images with your eyes. You have the image of sight. With writing, you have no direct senses. Sight, touch, smell, taste, sound—nothing. All you see are a bunch of ink blots on a page, and somehow they morph into an image, a scene. I think that's what separates writing as a medium, as opposed, say, to drawing, film, or music."
"It's barebone?"
"Exactly. None of the six senses are given to us, preprocessed. The words set up the skeleton of the scene, and our mind fills in the rest. Writers need a certain sensitivity to the speed at which we pick up on detail, which details we pick up on, and which otherworldly images are still within the scope of our imagination."
"Huh. It's kind of like a machine, one that takes in words and produces a world, inside the head."
"Like a dream?"
"Yeah, like the same machinery that produces dreams."
"Hmm. I like that."
She took back her phone, and returned to the voice that ear follows up and down. I watched as she read, thinking about the dreams born in someone else's head, and how they found their way onto a page, to be picked up and absorbed and replayed in her mind instead.
And I thought of all of humanity. Of how, through story, this shared network of inner worlds—unconstrained by the senses, unconstrained by reality—threaded through every mind. Beyond the physical world there was a second layer of narrative and thought that hovered above the ground, captured in words and thoughts.
It brought a new appreciation to the letters on the screen.
And, I decided, I liked that too.

PAINT by NUMBERS

In the garage, Jamie poured herself a third drink of whiskey and looked at the collection of stolen paintings that hung before her. Their frames had been cut away leaving only the canvas with jagged edges. Except for that, the artworks appeared much like they had when they hung in people's homes—the Rembrandts, Monets and Salvador Dalis . All surrounded by other perfect works from masters of centuries past.
Perfect. As if they were all paint by numbers
Then who placed the numbers?

She considered this as she finished her whiskey and returned to work, carefully rolling the paintings and inserting them into long plastic tubes. She labeled these with such names as reprints inc and The Masters series. Fake names that meant nothing, as long as the authorities didn't check into them. Jamie then placed the tubes into a wooden crate to be shipped off to the highest bidder. All of this for twenty-five percent cut of the profits, not bad for a common thief.
She did not appreciate the art herself. As far as she was concerned, all artists were pretentious. They all thought of themselves as above common crooks like herself, but still the thought returned to her.

What if all of the most famous paintings were conceived from a single mind?
Jamie finished packing the tubes into the crates, then nailed the lid down. She placed the forged document in the clear plastic holder along with the shipper's three percent cut of cash and sealed everything tight. Now all she had to do was wait for the pickup and she would be finished with her part. Still…
Who could have created thousands on paint by numbers templates? Could it be possible? Numbers written down so light that modern X-rays have never pick up on it.
The rapping on her garage door broke her pondering. The pick-up service arrived. They promptly lifted the crate into the van and after a quick signature, forged of course, and a flash from her fake ID. The crate were off to eager men and women to be displayed in offshore McMansions.

Ryan Rosenberry
@Ryan_Rosenberry

A master among masters. A God? A Devil? Or…
The thought tickled her. That so many of the famous painters were nothing more than ordinary people like herself, all patrons of a true master?
Then, what if…
All sculptors followed a blueprint?
Musicians all covers
And the dancers…
And the actors…
And the writers…
She clicked the garage door button and watched as the door shielded out the world from herself.
Nothing but common thieves, all of em…
She hoisted herself on an empty crate, poured another shot of whiskey and fanned her payment cash, cold and hard. She glanced around at the now empty garage.
Yup, all common thieves like herself.
Maybe they weren't so pretentious after all.

The above story does not reflect my personal belief in the creativity of artists. I just thought the concept would make a fun short story.
Then again, maybe the "master among masters" is more of a subconscious muse that all artists and humans draw from for inspiration. Maybe every piece of art be it music, writing, painting, dancing etc… has always, on some level, existed and is slowly leaking out into our world.



GROWING SMALLER IN MY MIND

Shahzeb Akhter | India
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I'm a mess of broken hearts thrown
in a drawer & I tell you I feel nothing
now eyes still like gazelle but not liquid
no more just coarse & mechanical
like love it doesn't matter if you turn
back or not eyes won't leap back at you
the drawer's closed for ever & I threw
its key up so high it metamorphosed
into a red gazelle with wings & burst
into a constellation like a validation
of something that's been there but
is now untouchable like what we had

A part of me is locked away in my self
in some drawer of my heart & I don't feel
incomplete if anything it's pride and
confidence it's like unlocking some
parts that I didn't know were there
& there's gratitude yes but not love no
I fed that word to the red gazelle with fins
she chewed at it so hard I believe you
could hardly make anything out
of its distorted shape I fed it to her
& I set her free to roam the seas
& she surfed & melted into corals
& is for ever until of course your
'humanity' doesn't pollute the sea

Evelyn Robinson
@bioeve

night THOUGHTS

Did you ever wake up, regretting that you ever met me? Because I never did. But I go to sleep every night with thoughts that you may have.

The other side of the bed is empty and cold. I dare not to touch it, because your scent still lingers like a flower on summer day. At night I close my eyes and can feel the faint of your body heat cutting through the night air. Like an amputee feeling an itch where their limbs are missing. Phantom limbs.

Where are you now? Can you still recall me from somewhere I cannot reach? Are you still waking up—if you ever sleep or even awake—calling my name from where no voice can echo? Because I can still hear your voice like a soft music box at the back of my head, but it's getting further away the more I try to reach it. Is it you talking? Or is it my sanity that starts seeping?

"Remember me when you are happy, remember all the happy thoughts we had so when I'm not here, missing me will bring a smile to your face. Because we are happy," was what you used to say. But how come I can only feel numbness inside? Were we happy? How does your smile look like? Your hair, what shade of red was it? Were your eyes blue or were they green? All I remember is that you looked like sunshine. My sunshine. My storm. My snow in August.

I open my eyes. The room is dark but I can still see my black suit and shirt hanging from the wardrobe.

Your funeral is tomorrow.





Devoid of tears, let out a bawl
Smiled upon, a real doll
A blooming bud, so fragrant
In a dancing light, the petals radiant
Each summer brought, more emotions at breeze
Adored by the birds, admired by the bees
But she, fully fascinated by the stars
Unperceived, mirages can leave scars

In near time, a rider came along
Nipped her off the branches strong
Pinned to his vest, an adornment
And rode afar, aiming for ascent
Racing on, in the midst, forgetting
That living is not the same as existing
Impassive, meanwhile, with a look of scorn
"No one picks a fallen rose", and rode on.

Lying ignored in a murky puddle
Seasons marched on, without a waddle
The flower that became, much withered, yet aromatic
Wild imagination is her music, she enigmatic
Forsaken dreams of a loving hold
For the world lacks her likes, bright, kind and bold

In his leisure, a gallant lad came by
Caressed the rose and uplifted high
"Not much life for me left", whimpered she
He smiled softly, "Neither for me"
With a gentle kiss, rooted her in his heart
And a forever promise, we will never be apart
"As long as I live, my love filled blood
Darling, will keep you blushing red"

And many a spring they merrily lasted
While nature blessed and blissfully celebrated
And one day when the lad slept his end
Not a minute longer, the rose lost her scent
Theirs became a legend divine
Understood by few, in my moonlit shine
Great poets wrote on love beyond love
But for me, I have been seen it so true, all from above.





Violet James | Canada

@VioletJames21

My elusive Muse



I need to tell you something, but I can't find the words. They toss in my head, jumbled like confetti, taunting me. My heart races with the elusiveness of a coherent thought. I settle and breath deeply and there you are again. Like an angel calling to me, your eyes are soft and kind, your fingers are outstretched. I try not to stir and risk losing you. Slowly I find my pen and scribble the words that dance on the tip of my subconscious. My madness abated for a moment more until the next time you wake me from the depths of my fitful dreams.

The sun washes over me and I open my eyes wide. What was that dream? It was so vivid. I turn to my nightstand and there you are in black and white. I brush my fingers over the markings and sigh with relief. You are with me even when I sleep.

My thoughts are all disjointed. I repeat them like a mantra as the image appears behind my eyelids. You are my mesmerizing madness, waking me at night. My muse is beside me as I toss between my sheets. With a twisting of my torso I reach for you, but darkness swallows you whole. I hold the pen above my pad hovering, waiting but I'm frozen. The lyrical images vanish like a frosty breath in winter.

HAUNTINGLY BEAUTIFUL

Belinda Brady
@bindyboo06

Abbey opened the mailbox, tentatively looking inside. Her heart skipped a beat when she saw there was a letter, a long-awaited letter, from a well-known music studio. She knew what it was about; her submission. A keen pianist since she was a child, Abbey had been submitting a melody she wrote to various studio's and music companies but to no avail. The melody in question was a haunting piece she had spent the best part of a year perfecting and although her friends and family told her how much they loved it, she needed that validation from an outsider that her music was worthy of being released to the world. She wanted people to love the tune as much as she did.

Before she could stop herself, Abbey tore open the letter and read it. 'Unfortunately, it is just not what we are looking for at this time. Thank you for your interest….' The words blurred as small tears started to fall, despite her best efforts to stop them. Abbey promised herself she would not get her hopes up about this submission, but secretly she really hoped this would be the studio that would be interested in her piece. Now she would be adding this letter to her ever-growing rejection pile.

Abbey stood at her mailbox and sobbed as she thought about all the rejection and heartbreak she had faced over the last year. She loved music - she lived and breathed it - and she had hoped it shone through when she played the piano, her hands effortlessly playing the notes she dreamt about in her sleep. She loved it too much not to try and make it and to get her music out there; but she feared it was just not going to happen for her. It seemed her music was only destined for the ears of loved ones. Abbey was turning to go back inside when she heard the voice of her elderly neighbor, Esme. "Hello Abbey dear, how are you today?" Esme asked in an ever-present happy tone. She was a wonderful neighbor and her and Abbey were always engaging in deep and meaningful chatter over their mailboxes. Before Abbey could stop herself, she turned around and let her neighbor see the tears, see the mascara streaked down her face. She needed to be comforted and she craved the positive, wise words Esme was sure to soothe. "Oh, my," Esme gasped, "Whatever has happened?" Pouring her heart out, Abbey told Esme everything. The rejections, the time she spent pouring her heart and soul into this melody, the love she had for music. She quietly admitted she was nearly ready to give up. "Oh no, never give up, dear, never. If you enjoy it, you keep at it," Esme gasps, "I hear you play and you are breathtaking. You
have a real talent there kid." She then starts humming a familiar tune and asks, "Is that the piece you've submitted? It's such a beautiful and memorable tune, it reminds me of my late husband for some reason. It's reminiscent of happy times but also stirs up some sad memories, in a wonderful way of course. It's brilliant. They are nuts to knock it back, nuts. What's it called?"

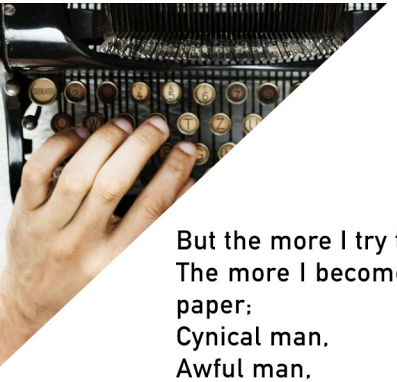
Abbey breaks into a grin as she realizes her neighbor is not calling her bluff. She does hear her music and has heard her tune, and likes it. She had touched someone. That thought alone made the pain of all those rejections worthwhile. "Its name?" she asks, "I have called the melody 'Hauntingly Beautiful,' as that's what it is for me – haunting and beautiful. It's been with me a long time and I have only just begun to get it out there."
"Hauntingly Beautiful," Esme repeats, "What a fantastic title, and appropriate. Well, I tell you what, the world needs to hear this my dear, it does. Keep at it. No matter how down you may feel, keep going. Even the greats got rejected before they got their break, you know, and they kept going. You should too. Besides, you make this old duck happy with your music, and that has to count for something, right?"

Laughing, Abbey pulls Esme in for a hug, thanking her and feeling a little uplifted after their conversation. Saying her goodbyes, Abbey went to go back into the house when Esme called out, "Tell me dear, do you have any plans Saturday afternoon?" Shaking her head Abbey replies, "No, why?" Smiling, Esme answers, "Why don't you come over to my house for afternoon tea. Oh, and bring your 'Hauntingly
Beautiful' piece with you. I assume you have it on disc, or whatever you kids call it these days, right?" Confused Abbey replies, "Of course." Turning toward her house, Esme casually calls out, "Perfect. See you around four o'clock, and don't forget that tune!"

Once inside her home, Esme picks up her phone and dials a familiar number. A voice on the other end announces she has reached a rather prestigious music studio. "Yes, I'd like to be put through to the CEO, Ms Doris Pass, please", Esme requests. After a brief hold, Esme is talking to her old friend Doris. Thick as thieves, they grew up together and share the same taste in music. Doris started this company and could have retired long ago, but her love of music has kept her there and the girls often chuckle that she will be doing this job until the day she dies. Esme knew Doris had to listen to Abbey's tune. She would love it.

"Hello Doris!" Esme exclaims, "Listen, what are you doing on Saturday afternoon? There is someone I would love for you to meet and a piece of music you need to hear. They're both hauntingly beautiful."





Part I: Scripture
I love writing, a recent passion Plucked out of thin air.



But sometimes I try to use writing To Leave behind
To Forget
To Bury
The man I was before these words. Running away from who I used to be; Damaged man,
Unproud man,
Lost man.

Austin Cerny | USA
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Part II: Earry Omens

But the more I try to run
The more I become permanent on paper;
Cynical man,
Awful man,
Bitter man,
EverythingIknowI'mnot man.
Now it feels like this love
Is all I have.
But where was this love
Before the haikus,
Before the black journal,
Before the typewriter.
The man before these words,
Dead.
But have I Buried the man who I am
Leaving behind In graves of ink
As if I haven't Forgotten anything at all?

I love listening, sounding waves. It feels more natural Than talking.
The words of others warm my ears And settle my heart.
But sometimes, I use my ears For more than just Hearing, More than just Understanding, More than just Learning.
But to try to get away from What's in my own head. The more I listen,
The more I hear,
The more I sink, Into the sound of Myself.
What type of harmony Does this sound voice? Scratching voices Voicing their loudest,
Insecurities, Insufficiencies, Inadequacies.
What type of dichotomy Does this sound create? Suffocating creations Creating their cloudiest Uncertainties, Unclarities, Unfamiliarities.
I listen to their weight,
In love with their exhaustion.
I hear their cries,
In tune with their obsession.
Going in both ears,
They fill my enticed
Space between.
And they stay.
Echoing off the walls,
Bouncing around my head-shaped mind. They never seem to leave,
And always find a way
To be me.

Part III: Vows

I love relationships, the people around me. A destiny I am bound to live.
Deep in my ancient memory,It oozes from that first smile.
But sometimes, I try to Use my friends,
Use my family,
Use my lovers,
For forgetting who used me. Seeing me as how I love; Thoughtful man,
Strong man,
Selfless man, AllthethingsIdo man.
But the more I love
The more it tears on my heart. A lively friendship,
A stable family,
A healthy lover,
Becomes a binary
To who I really am;
Sensitive man,
Lonely man,
Confused man, AllthethingsIfeel man.
And now I lie awake at night,
Worrying my relationships will crumble beneath me. But where was this worry
Before holding that door,
Before sneaking in that birthday gift,
Before cooking that surprise dinner.
The man I was before these smiles,
Healing.
But have I used my Selfless Strength
To pave Thoughtful roads
Of black and swirling dead ends?


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