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Jane's Face

by *Dana Taqi*

Day One

What have I done?! She was getting wheeled out of the hospital by one of the nurses. “It’s okay honey, it hurts now but you’re going to feel great in no time.” Jane wanted to slap her. What did she know about pain? Jane felt weak as she climbed into her friend’s SUV; she was uncomfortable but didn’t have the energy to argue with the nurse who insisted that she keep her head tilted back.

The drive home was torturing. Jane kept recalling her friends’ encouraging words: “Don’t worry it doesn’t hurt at all! And think of how gorgeous you’ll be once it’s all done.” All she felt was pain, a pounding sensation in her head. No; no not pounding, more like a drilling. Her head was being drilled into at precise locations, deep and severe. Jane couldn’t feel her face, she couldn’t feel where her nose ended and her lips began, her chin mixed with the air around her, she could only feel her forehead. Her pounding forehead.

Day Five

It’s been five days since Jane had surgery. Five more days and she could see what a big mistake surgery was. Five days of staring into the mirror not knowing what she really looked like. Five days without a major part of her identity. Oh God what have I done to myself?! Jane knew she was beautiful; she knew people found her attractive but something inside her always wanted to change. It wasn’t anything major; it was just a small part of her that didn’t belong there. She always wanted this surgery but Jane couldn’t help this feeling that was eating her up inside. There was no going back now, whatever the result, no matter how horrible.

Day Ten

She squeezed Sara’s hand in the doctor’s lavish waiting room. The pictures on the wall haunted her; she had been in this office more times than she could remember but her past visits were always hopeful. Jane would come in on her own, smiling, looking at the before and after pictures around her, longing for the day when she could be one of those women. There was nothing hopeful about today, however. Sara tried rubbing her back but Jane was still tense. She was going to see her new face in fifteen minutes. Fifteen minutes and her life was going to change forever. She recalled the day Lilly came back from her appointment in tears. Lilly had gone for a tummy tuck but came back with a mutilated stomach. She ended up with a large scar and a disfigured belly button. Jane promised herself that that would never happen to her, that’s why she had chosen Dr. Adams. “Dr. Adams will be with you in five minutes, Jane.”

She walked into Dr. Adams' office and he asked her to lie down while he removed her bandages. Jane's sweaty hands gripped the edge of the bed. The last bandage was off and Dr. Adams was reaching for a swab to clean around her new nose. He smiled as he handed her a small mirror. Jane's hands were trembling and she couldn't steady the mirror to get a proper look. There it was. Her new nose. A new Jane. Tears, hot tears ran down her cheeks as a smile broke through. *Thank God!*

Circle of Doom

by *Bedour Hamadah*

Abandoned
Heartbroken
Betrayed
Lonely
Hurt
Depressed
It doesn't matter anymore
I no longer care
I no longer feel
Pain has become my friend
Feelings have deserted my heart
There's no more waiting
There's no more wanting
No more holding on
I am no longer there
I no longer exist
I simply don't care
Just a name in the whirl of the wind
Just a picture in another book
Just a face in a blurry crowd
Just a person in this hazy world
I'm almost gone... almost there
Should I give up?
Should I hold on?
Didn't we agree no more holding on?
Didn't we agree no more feeling inside?
I can't do this again
I can't start all over
I want to let go
I want to give up
A voice far away
Said "It's not your time"
I'm sent back here again
I'm back again
Feeling things again
Depressed
Hurt
Lonely
Betrayed
Heartbroken
Abandoned

Falling

by *Fatmah H. Al-Qadfan*

There was something particularly delicate and unfathomable about autumn that always took Saif's breath away.

And today is no different, 10th October 2006, 3:19 p.m.; he notes the date and time, for the date and time are significant. He walks the spotless grey corridors, quickly, seeing through the walls and envisioning himself on the street. On his way out, he nods amicably at faces that have, after months of coming and going, become familiar. They squint curiously at him, biting back questions. Saif's smile keeps them at bay. When he smiles quietly like that, and his dimples magically appear, he becomes invincible. His eyes crinkle and dance to music only he can hear: a symphony so beautiful that it apparently makes him want to weep; because as his light brown eyes sparkle, they would also shine with a thin watery film. Saif smiles now because he is in no mood for tedious question/answer sessions. There will be time enough for good-byes. But now, autumn is here and Saif never keeps autumn waiting.

His fiancée often pouted and whined, saying that he was in love with a 'season'. She was not joking either. When Saif spends hours painting trees that looked like they were on fire, she would watch the intent expressions on his face. She would watch the way he carefully mixed colors, wishing it was her face he caressed and not the damn palette. Not that she doubted his love, but she felt that his passion for art and beauty surpassed the way he felt about the more tangible things in life.

"Do you know what they call this?" He would glance her way as he unscrewed a tube of paint. "This is vermillion. Now this here, this is auburn. And we refer to this as Bordeaux. Want to know why?"

"Saif, they're red."

"No, no, no," he would sigh, "what if I said all handbags were just handbags? Isn't that an insult to your LV? Is your *Chloé* anything like your *Fendi*? Are they all simply handbags?"

She would laugh and her jealousy would transform into a burning sensation that would start in her stomach and spread through her body. The wave of passion often left her light headed and breathless, yearning to be near him. To touch him, to tell him how much he meant to her. She could not imagine a life without him. She had already named their three kids and was planning family vacations.

As Saif steps onto the street, he thinks he hears her high-pitched giggle and before he can check himself, he turns to look for her. He immediately remembers where he is and chides himself. What would she be doing here anyway? She was at work right now, probably arguing with her co-workers about something – trying to get her way as usual.

Their latest topic of discussion fills his head as he walks away from the hospital.

“Maybe I should retire...” she would say pensively.

“Retire?” Saif’s eyes would bulge and he would cough and choke on whatever he was eating. “And do what? I thought you like your job.”

She would move her head closer and whisper conspiringly. “I don’t want to waste my time at work; I would rather be with you.”

“I want to be with you too. But I work in the mornings! And anyway, if you were stuck with me the whole day, you would get bored in a week.”

“I won’t. I want to spend my whole life with you. Every single day...”

Leaves litter the sidewalks and like a child jumping in puddles, Saif tries to step on all these leaves without making it seem obvious. The way a leaf crumpled and disintegrated into nothingness under his feet fascinated him. The soft crunch was often magnified in his ears, and he would step on another and another leaf, just to hear that strange sound again. Now he steps on the desiccated leaves, he steps on the miserable thoughts in his mind, and crushes them forcefully.

One year, his family happened to be home during September. Saif waited patiently for his season. Everywhere he went his eyes would scan for trees. But the trees were all parched, skinny and dead.

“Tell us about England,” his cousins would say as they gathered at their grandparents’ house for lunch.

Saif would hesitate. “Well the boys in school play cricket. And we have really beautiful trees there. In winter it snows.”

Later, as Saif reached his teens and he grew more detached from his motherland, he took his love of nature up as an argument whenever his parents talked about a visit.

I don’t want to go there. It’s boring. My cousins are all immature and nobody understands me. They don’t even have real seasons!”

A feeling of grief washes over him as he walks. He places one foot in front of the other without thinking. He wishes he had gone back more often and spent more time in his real home. Maybe he should have paid more attention on those long drives with his father when he pointed out, “This is where I used to pray every Friday. Later we would sit behind that wall and share a cigarette, your uncle and I” or, “In my days, that used to be the best cinema in the country, look at it now.

Autumn fills him with nostalgia. But this year, today to be precise, this nostalgia suffocates him. The feelings are more pronounced than ever. They take him forcefully by the hand and drag him for a walk. A walk he is reluctant to take, but has no choice.

When he was a boy of six or seven, he would collect as many brownish, dry leaves as he could. He would stuff his pockets with these leaves, his schoolbag and sometimes hold one or two ‘perfect’ ones in his hands. His mother would scold him later as she tried to clean the mess.

She could not understand why he had to pick up rubbish and bring it home.

“But I like them, and nobody wants them. Even the trees throw them away. And I want to keep them forever.”

There are a million things that he wants to keep forever. Or maybe he wants to live forever to enjoy all these trivial things that he loves. Like the night sky. He never gets bored of gazing at stars. And there are so many paintings that are still mere ideas floating around in his head. He wants to put all his ideas on canvas. He wants to travel the world: to walk every single shore, to taste every delicacy and meet peoples of every race. But nobody has that kind of time...least of all Saif.

Another scene comes into focus before his eyes. A young boy, with skinned knees and messy brown hair.

“Why is she crying?” he asked his dad bewildered. His mother, the source of strength and support, was whimpering like a baby on the couch. Her cheeks glistened with tears and she mumbled incoherently. His father took him by the hand and gave him a solemn lecture. Nobody lives forever; the first rule of the game. And they would never see Aunt Reem again. His dad referred to everything as a game. It sometimes got confusing and Saif did not know who was playing what.

Memories merge in his mind and they become one long string of events, with no beginning, middle or end. A phrase here, a word there, his first sailing lesson, high school dances, football games, movie nights, and his engagement party. Family dinners.

He imagines how tonight's dinner will be. He sees himself kiss his mother's forehead and ask his father about his day. He takes his fiancée's hand and leads her to the table, where his younger siblings are arguing about something or the other. The smell of rice and chicken is overpowering but the chairs feel harder than usual and the curtains catch his eye. They are old-fashioned and in need of a wash. He waits for the perfect moment. When they are half way through the delicious meal, or right after his mother has poured him a glass of water or when they are talking about the latest political dilemma...Or no, he waits until they are done eating before he makes his announcement. So as not to ruin their appetites. Always the considerate son, brother, husband, friend...Saif waits until they are all done eating, then he stands up and tells them that the tumor is back. Like an old friend who has come for a visit, but has changed his mind and decided to stay permanently. He explains that this time, treatment will be futile. And he tells them that time is running out. He wants to tell them more, but words fail him, he falters and somehow he falls.

The Pinocchio Theory

by Nur Abdelhalim

When I'm multicolored they all seem to be so
beige, too opaque for my taste
and when I try to blend in—I try too hard and
end up fading out of the picture
even if *miracles are made in the heart*
They've all got what they're good at and I'm just
standing lost, without a map, waiting for a hand
to guide me
'cause *applause may be good for the moment, but love is everlasting.*
But all I'm stuck with is this
Jiminy Cricket
telling me that my rightismyleftandmyleftismyright
it's a good thing I stopped listening
to everything
Otherwise
I'd be lost
like I am now, without you
When your heart is in your dream, no request is too extreme.

Benighted

by *Haya A Al-Qassar*

Awake again, in the middle of the night—restless. Memories haunt her mind; memories she wishes to forget. No use. She closes her eyes and hopes...to drift... off...

Time to wake up. The sun-light shines through the never opened, translucent curtains, creating a spotlight on the right side of the room. She opens her eyes to a vibrant red spot that dims to the muddy grey that encompasses the walls around her. *Sigh. Why is this room so big?*

In the mirror, she tightly pulls her long, lustrous hair in a bun, fastening it with red clips that she covers with stray strands. Glistening white pearls are draped around her pale, long neck. Her red camisole is hidden under a dull black suit. After making sure the red is not visible, she walks down the stairs. It's time for work.

Walking towards Amy's desk with a forced smile, she mechanically says, "Good morning, Amy. How are you today?"

"Doin' well Mrs. B, doin' well."

She enters her archaic yet immaculately organized office, filled with lifeless furniture. On every wall are abstract paintings with intricately placed contrasting colors. Slowly, she takes the long walk to her desk and keeps her eyes drawn towards the floor. Taking a deep breath, she finally sits down and turns towards the couch adjacent to her desk; her eyes, however, are attracted to the illuminating colors of the painting above it. Strands of hair start to fall and she smiles faintly. She runs her fingers over the cold surface of the silver bracelet on her wrist with the initials D.R. *If only I could tell you...*

A knock on the door interrupts her nostalgic moment. She elegantly pushes the hair from her face and pulls up her jacket, completely concealing the rich red camisole. *Compose yourself Victoria. Your ten o'clock is here.* "Come in," she says with forced poise. *Wait, why didn't Amy buzz me?* She shrugs her shoulders and shakes her head.

A man dressed in a ridiculously loud outfit enters. Victoria is taken aback with this man's appearance. He's moderately handsome yet hides beneath an atrociously bright shirt, paired with ratty, torn pants that barely seem to fit. Every hair is out of place and the imperfections on his face are visible, although he is hidden by the shadow of the door. As he comes forward, his eyes beam with joy, even though one is slightly lazy, and his crooked smile is bright. *Why does he look familiar?*

"Dmitri?" Victoria asks, with slight disdain.

"That's me."

"Please, sit down."

"This room is really dark. You should get rid of the curtains. I don't believe in curtains. Let some light into the room, Victoria," Dmitri replies, with a sly smirk that extends from the right side of his face.

"I would prefer it if you were to refer to me as Dr. Bnight," Victoria replies as she

starts fidgeting with her bracelet.

He looks around the room and his animated expression changes to that of disapproval. Slowly, he walks towards the couch next to Victoria's desk, constantly looking at every detail on her walls. As soon as he sits on the couch, he grabs the picture that sits in the middle of the flawlessly organized desk -- a cloudy image that portrays the silhouette of two people. "Why do you have a blurry picture on your desk?" Dmitri asks genuinely.

Shocked at his blunt audacity, Victoria retorts, "I'm supposed to be asking you questions, Dmitri. I'm here to help you."

"I know. But then I should be able to spend my time and money as I please. So, why do you have a blurry picture on your desk?" His grin extends farther as he puts the picture down on the right side of her desk.

"I have my reasons," she says with uncontrollable irritation as she moves the picture back to the middle of her desk. *Victoria, don't lose your nerve, be professional.* "So, what brings you here?"

"I want to talk to you."

"About?"

"Life."

"Don't you think that's a bit ambiguous? Anything in particular you would like to discuss?"

"It is, isn't it?"

"Why don't you start by telling me a little about yourself?"

"Well, I've had a pretty interesting life..."

"...and that is what happened to Kat and Jamie."

"It always helps to vocalize your feelings without the need to hide behind a social persona."

"Very true...but things like that happen. There is nothing I could have done to prevent it. I don't regret a single moment I spent with them."

"I wish you could have brought this up earlier because our time is up. We'll pick up where we left off tomorrow."

As Dmitri strolls out the door, whistling, Victoria gets out her notepad and writes:

He appears to be at peace with everything that happened. But I don't think that's the case. If he was ok with it, why does he constantly babble and change the subject? He covers up his pain with a smile.

The next day she walks into her office and finds Dmitri waiting patiently.

"Dmitri, who let you in?"

"Oh Amy said I could wait for you in here."

"Could you hold on while I talk to her?"

"Um...why don't you just sit down so we can talk? After telling you about Kat and Jamie yesterday I really need to get some more things out. Besides, time always passes by fast."

She looks out the door and then back at Dmitri. *I can deal with her later.* "Ok, so what is on your mind?" she says as she sits at her desk.

"After I left, I was thinking about how Kat and I met. How angelic her face looked on our wedding day. How I felt when she told me she was pregnant. And then how our life felt so fulfilled once Jamie entered our lives. Just the pivotal moments in my life."

"But what would you say is the most pivotal moment in your life?"

"Talking to you right now."

Victoria looks at him in utter disbelief and raises her left eyebrow, "Dmitri, if you are not going to be serious then I suggest you leave. You are wasting your time and money."

"There is no such thing as a 'waste of time.' Besides, I'm just trying to lighten the mood seeing as to how the room is so dark." His smile returns, this time almost mocking her. "But seriously, as you put it, I want to talk about...lost loves." He sits up on the couch, crosses his legs, clasps his hands together and stares at Victoria with his piercing hazel eyes.

Victoria's heart sinks to her stomach and an overwhelming feeling of grief overtakes her as she stares at the picture on her desk and fidgets with her bracelet, turning it around on her wrist. She composes herself, looks at the painting above Dmitri's head, and takes a deep breath. "How do you feel with the loss of your wife and child?" she asks with sangfroid.

"You never lose anyone you love, Victoria."

"Dr. Knight," her irritation growing with every word he says. "And why would you say that?"

"Why shouldn't I? Don't people enter a person's life to leave an impression?" he replies as his eyes wander towards the painting above him. "I love the colors in that painting. They just speak to you."

I'm sure if they could speak, they wouldn't be as loud as your shirt.

"But anyways, where were we? Oh yes. Lost loves. After a while, I realized that nothing lasts forever, nor should it. I mean, would you want to live forever? No. But you live to experience the best and worst of what life offers. People should be happy when they find love—not grieve over their loss. That just defeats the purpose, wouldn't you agree?" His eyes wander to the couches, "Wow, the colors of the couches are really bleak and solemn. It gives off such a morbid vibe."

Why can't he stick to one train of thought? He's probably repressing some feelings.

"But how do you feel?" Victoria asks.

"Lucky. They were incredible. Everything I had ever wished for and I was lucky enough to have them in my life. The paintings on your walls are so beautiful, especially the one in the right corner. I love the contrast between the black and red."

Victoria gets out her notepad and writes:

Dmitri is in grief over the loss of his wife and child. He is repressing his feelings and is circumlocutory in his replies. He is in denial and refuses to deal with reality. Easily distracted. Needs to deal with loss.

"Do you feel like you have dealt with the grief?"

"Why should I grieve over their death when I should be celebrating their lives. Why focus on the negative when I should focus on the positive? Why look at the dark corner and not the light that shines through it? What is the point of dwelling on the past and not looking forward to the future? But hey, that's just my perspective."

For once, Victoria did not know how to respond.

"Oh wow, our time is up. I have to go. It was nice talking to you. I have to go, Victoria."

Dmitri jumps up and strolls towards the door. Halfway out the door, he turns and looks at Victoria with a bright smile, and winks. Dmitri is gone. Victoria sits in silence. She turns around and opens the curtains in her office, something she had never done before. She looks out the window and sees Dmitri joyfully walking down the sidewalk, greeting strangers with an infectious smile. *He's right.*

She turns to her mirror and takes off her black jacket, revealing the red camisole. She takes the pins out of her hair and lets it cascade to her shoulders. She unclasps the bracelet and puts it down next to the picture. *But where is Amy? If she is on another lunch break, I'm firing her.*

"Amy, why didn't you let Dmitri wait for me outside?"

"Who?"

"My ten o'clock, Dmitri."

"Um...no one has been here all day, Mrs. Bnight. And your ten o'clock has cancelled the past two days."

Train of Thoughts

by *Bedour Hamadah*

Questions point their fingers at me
Memories burning in my heart
Are we meant to be together?
Are we meant to be apart?
Deep within my soul
I believe our love is true
Yet things happening now
Weigh down on me and you
Fate enticed us to be
It wasn't our fault
Love is no game to play
When the stake happens to be your heart
Pain engulfs completely
Our souls are lost and scarred
Somehow we manage to hold on
For dead we'll be apart
Whatever is yet to happen
Forget me not my love
Till the day our spirit depart this earth
You'll be my only true love...

Wit and Love

by *Kheiriyeh Ahmadi*

When you need a rough shoulder on to cry,
Need hands to ease sorrows away from you,
And when you need to have two wings to fly,
Nothing of such matter happens to you.

When your love is far away from your reach,
See life is far too short to get to it.
To make you know this, it's life's task to teach,
It's not touchable for you to make sense of it.

But when your sentiments call you to act,
Does your logic stop harshly in your way?
Even if so, it's all a part of fact,
For wit takes your passion from you away.

You will never lead your life by mere wit,
For life is gone when you come to love it

Dangerous Art Addiction

by *Bedour Hamadah*

“Are you sure?” he raised his eye questioningly.

Teri looked at the man sitting across the table and held her head high. “Yes, I’m sure,” she replied, her voice silky, filled with pride.

Marcus pushed his chair back and put his head in his hands. He retrieved his pack of Philip Morris Menthols, lit one and sat up straight and thought about the proposition. “But... can... how are you going?”

“You leave the details to me, just tell me, you want it or not?” she impatiently tapped on the table.

He got up and led Teri to the bar in the living room and made a couple of drinks but she refused hers. She tried to lighten up the mood but Marcus was still distant.

Teri shrugged and poured herself a glass of red wine and sat by the fireplace waiting for an answer. She couldn’t help but notice the paintings that hung on the walls. *Starry Night*, *The Potato Eaters*, *Portrait of Dr. Gachet*, he had them all, and one, only one was missing from his astonishing Van Gogh’s collection, *Vase with Fifteen Flowers*.

She unconsciously rearranged the tulips in the vase at the bar and stopped to admire her work. Marcus was studying her every move and was intrigued by the way she delicately handled the flowers and how she carefully arranged them.

“Listen, doll, I want to know how. I need to know how. I can’t just let you go do this without getting the details.”

“Marcus, darling, this is my part of the job. Your part of the job will be to give me half the amount before I go, and when I return, you give me the other half.

What happens between the first and second payments is for me to figure. Do we have a deal?” she prodded.

He lit another cigarette and returned to his cocoon of silence. *I have been waiting for this moment my whole life. This is what I want, it’s what I need. I cannot turn this offer down. But why won’t she tell me how?* “Doll, if you don’t want to tell me how you’re going to do it fine, but can you guarantee that nothing will happen to you? I want to know that I won’t have to hire anyone to look after you. You know I’ll do it.”

“Marcus, if you do that I promise you that I will send you the ashes in a jar. Maybe then you’ll understand that I like to work solo,” she threatened with a mischievous smile. The look on Marcus’s face made her laugh.

Marcus smiled and poured himself another drink. “Alright doll, how much?” he asked, stirring the ice around in his half full glass.

“Hmm... since I really like you, let’s make it \$113 million. Reasonable price don’t you think? So if I have the math right, \$56 million before, and \$57 million after.” Teri suggested cautiously. “So, Marcus, do we have a deal?”

“Only \$113 million? I expected something like \$700 million.”

“Well it would be that if you’re asking for the ‘Mona Lisa’.”

Marcus stared at her lips, trying to memorize the contour lines, the way her lips pouted when she was serious, her smile.

He got up and motioned for her to follow him. They walked silently down a series of hallways that were dark except for the glowing of a candle or two. The hallway twisted and turned and they passed by many doors. Some were open, others were not.

A minute later they reached their destination, a door that required fingerprint scanning to authorize the entrance of anyone. Marcus placed his fingers on the screen and a message of acceptance appeared as the door opened. She noted all this, the maze and the high level of security. *Typical*, she thought.

They walked into a big round room, Marcus’s private painting room. At one end of the room was a desk, and they both walked towards it amidst all the paintings and sketches on drawing easels and the still-lives set up in unsystematic arrangements.

Marcus opened the first drawer, pulled out a briefcase stacked with \$100 bills and handed it over to Teri. “This is the \$56 million that you asked for, and upon delivery I will give you the remaining \$57 million. You got yourself one hell of a deal there doll.”

She opened the briefcase and closed it again. She smiled at Marcus. “So it’s the one with fifteen flowers, not twelve, right?” She said straight into the voice recorder button on her sweater.

Joey waiting outside heard everything, and this was his sign. With one quick call back-up was on the way.

“Yes, the one with the fifteen flowers.”

Teri looked at him lingeringly and smiled, “Are you sure?”

To Meet a True Friend

by *Anurag Galhotra*

You look haggard and lost my friend,
and yet you smile?

Irony deserves nothing less old man.
How else would I have gotten here?
I thought you would have accepted that by now.

Acceptance is an ill-flavored apple my friend;
and so you laugh?

Surely not at you, just what you say old man.
Acceptance is not such an apple.
Ill flavor, is to stop a child crying at night,
And stay awake just to hear his laugh in the morning.
But enough of that.
Certainly you have fought many battles like these?

And won my young friend, although
I fear you have lost a few too many?

One doesn't win when one is forced to fight old man.
The arena so full.
The crowd so unforgiving.
You see old man,

I had to lose for them to feel victory,
I had to break myself for them to feel complete.

You see old man,

I showed them that light was just a dream if there was no darkness,
I told them a whisper was just silence if there was no scream,
The mind was just a whore if it wasn't for the heart,
The heart, just as dead if it wasn't for the soul.

You see old man,

For us to be able to hate so lovingly,
We would have to be able to love just as painfully.

And so you too, my friend, are an old man,
and yet you still smile?

Yes I am, and yes I do smile.
For every slice of rotten bread I had to eat,
The apples in their mouths grew sweeter.

So, I just asked for Hell.
And wouldn't you know it?
The irony is I didn't even get that.
Instead I make an old friend like you.
Would you not smile?
If you finally were on the right side of the wrong fence.
And irony was your only true friend.

Come my friend, let's smile and be old men.

Failing Nations

by *Abdulaziz al Mossalem*

I see disarray everywhere;
Concluding that explaining is ineffectual
I walk the righteous road,
For myself and not my surroundings.

The question marks tell me
That the only chance at autarky,
Is buried within the
Despondent generations.

Karma

by Dana Taqi

DON'T GET CAUGHT. DON'T GET CAUGHT. Yousef was running now, his feet hitting the ground with such force that he didn't feel the soil or grass under him. HIDE. No. Hiding wouldn't do him any good now would it? It'll just make it worse. Keep running. That's it. I'll just run until I can't hear her anymore.

"Yousef!"

Oh God what's the point? I might as well go to her. Yousef ran towards the voice now, his heartbeat matching the thump of his feet. DENY EVERYTHING. He couldn't be punished for something he didn't do. YES. *They can't do anything; they have no proof, no proof.*

"Yousef!"

"I didn't do it!"

"I haven't accused you of anything yet."

"Oh."

"Did you..."

"No! I swear!"

"Will you wait?! I haven't accused you of anything yet."

"I swear I didn't do it! I was with Ali." *Hmmm, ok she suspects something.* "I was dead at the time!"

"Stop it. You're just being ridiculous. DID YOU BRUSH YOUR TEETH?"

"Yes...No...I don't know. What's the right answer?"

"Yousef!"

"Yes?"

"I want you to tell me the truth. Did you brush your teeth?"

"Yes?"

"Did you use toothpaste?"

"Yes."

"Which toothpaste?"

That's it. She knows. CONFESS. NO

"The one we always use, you know. The blue one?"

"We don't use blue in this house, we only use red"

Oops!

"Aaaah."

"How many times do I have to tell you not to use Mommy's things?"

"But..."

"No Buts! Come with me, you're going to clean up the mess you made."

Dalal dragged her son to the bathroom. The place looked like a battlefield. Her shaving cream was spread into a pattern only the devil could create. Hair gel added some color to this masterpiece while talcum powder added texture, bringing the entire picture together. Her son topped it all off by using her expensive face cream to draw a smiley face on the bathroom mirror.

Why did I have to cancel his camping trip?

University

by *Tarek Fahmy*

When I entered university,
I saw diversity.

I saw students walking.
I saw students talking.

I saw students laughing.
I saw students crying.

I saw students panicking.
I saw students suffering.

I saw a guy with a beard.
I was surprised that he looked very weird.

I looked at the girls and the way they dress.
Oh, my god. What a mess!

I saw students playing in the sun.
Running and jogging, having a lot of fun.

I saw a student trying to dream.
Enjoying the delicious taste of ice cream.

I took an exam and I did very well.
Looking at my face, I know you could tell.

I noticed a beautiful girl walking with her glasses.
Seeming to enter one of her classes.

There are many activities like playing basketball.
Also playing tennis, soccer and volleyball.

I saw two students playing a game of dice.
They suddenly looked at the ground and freaked out from seeing mice.

I saw a girl crying in tears.
Trying to remember her most terrible fears.

I met a student who was with me in high school.
He was really a lovable person, he was really so cool.

I saw guys and girls entering exams.
Wearing t-shirts that they bought from Debenhams.

I saw students studying for a test.
Praying and wishing god for them to score the best.

My professor asked me to write a poem in ink.
Writing it neatly using the color pink.

I watched a student holding a cute pussycat.
Trying to dress it with a peculiar hat.

I listened to a guy playing a guitar.
I was so amazed he looked exactly like a star.

I watched a guy playing a harmonica.
I did not know that he bought it from Santa Monica.

I met a girl whose name was Claire.
She really grabbed my attention, I had to stare.

That is how university life can be.
Thank you very much for listening to me.

Into Infinity

by *Nur Abdelhalim*

The world is like a doily:

“Circular, and pretty when untouched, but so easy to tear apart and stain,”
said the Old Man waiting at the bus stop
he stands there every day, with no destination
but counting on that bus to take him somewhere new

“People. . . people are like peaches.
Some perfect on the outside but sour on the inside,
others bruised but (bitter)sweet.”

I took the old man by the hand
and led him to the edge of the world,
pointing out into infinity and asking about life.

“Life is like you and me, Kid. Going with the flow—
It’ll take turns, make mistakes, and eventually stop.”

He was not at the bus stop the next day,
and written on his headstone was,
“He eventually stopped. Go with the flow, Kid.”

A rather bad attempt at poetry; or, bitten by a pineapple

by *Zainah Alrujaib*

There once lived a little girl in a castle, they say,
Whose birthday came September, or perhaps July, or May,
In height she was quite tall, or perhaps she was a midget,
That's not something about which I would have you fidget.

Her mother taught her all, of age she showed no sign,
Though I'm afraid I cannot say that one thought her benign,
She tended to claim for her own, you see, all that is yours or mine!

And therein their incline.

For one afternoon, just before tea, some time after midday,
Her little daughter vanished! the precious thing went astray!
The servants know: they saw her crow atop their stack of hay.

The girl had, as children do, adventures like in a dream,
With a big brown bear that caught a fish and ate it by the stream,
Then came a foreign circus, and they were quite a team,
They danced about in their large pink tent, supported by a beam,
Then the girl gave a scream!

She fell quite still, for she was very ill, how tragic!
'What should we do!' the townspeople cried, and stomped her in their panic!
Something like this, I daresay, requires nothing short of magic.

She turned yellow, you can imagine, her disease was exceptionally vile,
No magician, you or old, could bring back her lovely smile,
Save for one wizened wizard, traveling in a blizzard, who cast a spell with his
magic crystal tile.

Here ends the tale, dear friends, for all is well and good,
And you will remember, in all stories, that's the way they should.
What of the girl, you ask? Now she can only babble.
And no wonder, she was bitten by a pineapple!

My Staircase

by Fatmah H. Al-Qadfan

I used to perch myself at the top of the narrow staircase.

“You think I’m stupid? You think I don’t know why you go to work all dolled up?”

“What? Don’t give me that. I’m sick of your suspicions and accusations. If you have something to say, come right out and say it!”

Tuning in to their fights night after night did wonders to my vocabulary. One day, in a moment of anger, I called Jenny a s---. She kept tugging at my ponytail when the teacher wasn’t looking, and it got to me.

“Stop it you s---!”

The class went quiet. Our young and naïve teacher, Ms. Rose, gasped. I was pulled out of class and thrown into the principal’s office; they called my parents in.

“I don’t know where she could have possibly heard such language,” mother’s eyes widened.

So I would perch myself at the top of that staircase. Their loud voices and the crashes drew me like magnets. I would crawl out of my bed and to my secret post. I took Liam my best friend with me and held him in my lap.

“Who was that? Who were you on the phone with?”

“Rachel! Who else would I be talking to?”

“Yeah right. Right, that was Rachel. Call her now. And give me the phone.”

Liam often got scared, but I whispered in his ear that it would be alright.

They’ll be fine in the morning, I said. Don’t worry. It’s ok. They love me, and they love you, Liam. They love each other. It’ll be ok.

Once, as Liam and I watched, I dozed off. I leaned my head against the cold metal railing...and somehow, I slept. Their endless banter shaped my nightmares. I dreamt I was Mom. I was grown up. And Dad was shouting at me, he wouldn’t stop and I was getting angry...I was so angry, I flung the remote control at him, or maybe it wasn’t the remote control, everything was blurry in my dream. Then Liam screamed and I woke up. I woke up scared, thinking they heard Liam. I looked down, and the small den was empty.

With Liam in tow, I began to crawl back to my room. I held my breath and moved slowly, the parquet scratched my bare knees. Something was not right. Inching my way back to the staircase, I peered into the semidarkness. I saw her after awhile, Mom lying on the floor. Broken glass sparkled all around her. It was almost pretty. Some of the shards were glossy and red... She wasn’t moving.

Mom’s sleeping, I told Liam. We went back to my room. It was the last time we watched one of those fights...

For there is a story I should tell

by AA

For there is a story I should tell,
A story that should be told.
All the secrets and experiences I should sell,
And are worth for it to be sold.

But it must be understood and shared.
For it can help and care,
For those who can compare,
And relate to the despair.

But what I should and shouldn't do,
Is for me to decide.
For it was me and the despair that I went through,
That took not a moment but a lifetime to hide.

So many words have been written,
But still no story has been given,
Neither problems have been helped,
Just mine that I have dealt.

Broken

by Bedour Hamadah

I don't know why I'm still here... The lampshade was slightly crooked and Samantha unconsciously straightened it. The curtains were open wide and she noted that the restaurant lights under them were still on despite the late hour.

She carefully got out of bed, moved towards the glass door, and rested her head on the cool glass. Samantha looked over her shoulder and saw his familiar figure fast asleep on the bed, snoring away noisily. She grabbed her cigarette pack and went out to the balcony.

Samantha quickly lit a cigarette and threw the match over the balcony railing. She inhaled deeply and let her breath out in rings of smoke. The rings mingled into a cloud as her thoughts tangled up in her head. She remembered the day they first met... *I was having a cup of cocoa in the student lounge... his black shirt was wrinkled... someone was playing on the piano...* "I'll give you the moon and the stars, I'll give you my life too. Just promise you'll be mine and I promise to always love you!" he assured her a month after their first meeting.

Nauseated, Samantha flicked her cigarette into the air and cuddled up on the couch in the living room. She put up her legs on the cluttered TV table and closed her eyes. *Why can't I be happy with this guy?* She kicked an empty coke can off the table.

"Samantha, why are you awake? Is everything ok?" he called out from the bedroom.

"Um, yeah I'm alright," she bit her lower lip.

"Come back to bed," he insisted.

"I don't feel like it, I'll sleep in a while, don't wait up for me." It was 2:40 a.m.

Why is he up?

Steven shuffled into the living room and fell into the seat beside Samantha.

"What's wrong? Why are you sitting in the dark? Why aren't you asleep?" he asked her nonchalantly.

"What's wrong?" she echoed. "Nothing, Steven, I'm just not sleepy right now."

Steven opened his mouth then changed his mind. After a moment of hesitating he decided to talk. "Since you're not sleepy do you mind talking?"

Samantha raised her eye uncertainly, *So he is planning to tell me...* "Sure, I don't mind, let's talk. About...?"

"Samantha, we've been together for one year and almost seven months, right?" he cautiously asked, and Samantha nodded.

"Close to the big two years huh. Don't worry, I'll get you something nice; I know you loved the shirt I gave you last birthday. I know I've had it for years and it wasn't exactly clean, but you gotta admit it was kinda cute right?" he beamed proudly.

"Yeaah. Okay." *Cute? Hmm...* "Is that what you want to talk about? It's alright honey I got over that."

“Actually it’s something else.”

Through the window a car’s screeching could be heard followed by a series of loud honks, the streets were then silent again.

“You have some habits that really bother me, and I feel like they’re driving me away from you,” he confessed.

“Habits? Habits that bother you? Like what? How come... how come you never mentioned this before?” asked Samantha as she twisted her hair around her fingers.

“It’s not much, just minor things. Like it bothers me when you get upset and tell me to clean the apartment. I know it’s dirty but I will clean it eventually.”

“Steven, you do realize that it took me and two part-time helpers three days, three *consecutive* days to clean this place, and look at it now, it’s dirty again! We finished cleaning this mess two days ago, two days ago, Steven. Look at the table, there’s so much mess I don’t know where to start, and this is only two days of dirt! And do you realize that this apartment’s carpets have never been vacuumed until you met me?” Samantha argued.

“If you’re going to act childish with me then I won’t waste my breath,” he said.

“Chi- ... Ok, go on.”

“I hate it, utterly hate it when you pretend you’re on a diet. Face the facts

Samantha, you’re fat, and no matter how hard you “diet” you’re never gonna be thin.”

Samantha could only gape at him. She regained her tranquility and confidently looked at him in the eye. *Should I spoil my surprise? Should I tell him, or should I wait?*

“Oh and another thing, Samantha, you are so stubborn. When I tell you not to do something you still do it. You act like a kid when you make up your mind about something and I feel like you want to shut down every piece of logic.”

“Are you serious? Steven, that doesn’t make any sense. I...” *I just can’t be bothered... it doesn’t matter anymore...*

“Samantha, seriously you need to consider changing your attitude. Don’t do me any favors then turn around and ask for something in return. You want to do things for me, fine! I don’t mind, but don’t expect me to do you a favor for it.”

Samantha sat in silence distracted by her thoughts. As she got up and headed towards the balcony for a cigarette, she turned around and saw Steven grab a slice out of the pizza box that had been lying on the floor for two days.

“Hey Samantha, I’m off to bed, yeah? Put the lights out when you’re done!” he yelled with his mouth full and half a slice in his hand.

Samantha sunk into the beanbag and thought about what had happened. *Can you love someone and hate them just as passionately?* The cool breeze played with her hair and made her shiver. *Why am I still here?*

She got off the beanbag and went straight to the drawer. She knew what was in there, and she knew it would destroy everything she had worked so hard on holding together. From the moment they declared their love for each other she put so much effort into building and maintaining their relationship and she knew that by opening this drawer she would be the one who destroys it. *Or what’s left of it...*

Samantha was up by 7:00 a.m. next morning. She put on her Pumas, her Versace shades and was out the door. She left her copy of the apartment keys on the TV table along with her wedding ring. As she was waiting for the elevator, a neighbor opened the door to take out the trash and smiled at her. She forced a smile through her tears, got into the elevator and headed to the ground floor. She hurriedly exited the building, took out a cigarette and brushed her tears aside and smiled. *It's a beautiful day, the perfect day for a new start!* Samantha got into her red convertible and drove back to the university dorms.

Steven woke up around midday with the biggest migraine. "Samantha? SAMANTHA? Get me some aspirin, my head's gonna explode! Samantha? Are you still sleeping?" He waited for a while and when no one showed up he rolled out of bed.

As he walked into the living room he realized that there was no one. "Lets see if I can find some aspirin here," he talked to himself as he rummaged through the mess on his TV table. Coke cans fell off but he didn't care. It was only when he heard keys hitting the ground that he stopped to pick them up. "Samantha's keys? She never forgets anything."

He walked over to his desk and scanned the surface but saw no aspirin. Something in the corner of his eye caught his attention. His desk drawer was slightly open and the key was on the side. He opened it and was shocked. The photos were torn up into pieces, so were his phonebook and the love letters from Emily. There was a note on top of the rubble, written in Samantha's curvy handwriting, only one sentence, one question: How could you?

“Sunshine and Things”

A Poem for Gerard Manley Hopkins

by *Nur Soliman*

For these things I am grateful--for sunshine and things—
For blue sky above palms of shining gold and green;
For the clear eyes of laughing children, ne'er dim;
For the sea life a field of drop't diamond rings;
For woolen red caps, ears beneath seldom seen;
For shells and broken glass by the sea's brim;
All things bright and curious, new and set;
Whatever is new, all that has ever been;
With soft, hard; colored and not; bright and dim;
'Tis He who brings us the light He does let;
And I am grateful to Him.

Doors

by *Anurag Galhotra*

It was raining pain that night,
when you knocked on my door.
But by all, no soul could have asked for more.
For hope and regret you were just right.
It was raining pain that night.

Sunshine for a year, the weatherman had said.
Never believe the weatherman my Mother had said.
Son, there's half a glass, go ahead and fill it,
I never did tell her there was a crack in it. But,
Sunshine for a year, the weatherman had said.

Every morning I gave you my life,
Always, always there for you to hold.
Either we were dying together,
or your hands were getting very cold. Yet,
Every morning I still gave you my life.

Actions speak louder than words I was told,
They lie, they lie, and their lies are bold.
But wait, an angel's voice is in the air,
'I told you love, I'll never be unfair.'
My, oh My, they really don't lie,
Actions do speak louder than words!

It's easy for me to shatter my dreams.
They've been shattered for me before.
The weatherman's got nothing in sight.
The shards of glass are all over the floor.
It rained so much pain that night.
Just like the rain I feel this night.
If actions really do speak louder than words,
Then tell me why,

Why am I now at your door?

White Carnations

by *Fatmah H. Al-Qadfan*

He sits in the heaps of rubble and dirt,
Watching the scene unfold in his mind's eye -
Each time feeling the fear, pain and the hurt.
His throat tightens, and he tries not to cry.

This junk and tangled metal was once a home...
It breaks his heart that it exists no more.
Bombs fell; wrecked their life; their dreams were torn.
Alone. And nothing's the way t'was before.

He digs in the debris and finds something
His little sister's arm, bloodied and charred
The tears roll down, his anger makes him cringe,
And the broken arm, he flings, 'cause it's marred.

On their graves he lays a white carnation...
Praying for them and the dying nation.

Sugar Coating

by Dana Taqi

God I wish I were thin. Don't worry I don't want anything drastic, I just want to look like those women I see in magazines. Why do they have to look so beautiful? I look at them everyday, flipping through the pages of *Vogue*, *Elle* and *In Style*, looking for a single flaw. Nothing. They're perfect. I know what you're going to say. You're going to tell me that all these pictures are airbrushed and I know that, I'm not oblivious to the world around me, but still. I want to look like them and that's that.

I wish I were thin, gorgeous and could have any man I want. I should be getting back to work in a few minutes. Just a few more minutes to finish my sandwich and admire Giselle's abs. If I had one wish, one wish that would make me happy for the rest of my life, if some genie suddenly appeared out of my Pepsi can it would be this: I wish I were thin. No. I wish I were thin and could stay thin no matter what I ate. Sound ridiculous? Not really. You see I know why I'm so overweight. I love food. I keep telling people that it's my hormones, a family gene gone wrong, anything to keep their diet advice away. The bottom line is this: I, Rebecca Robertson, am a fat cow and I can't stop eating.

Before you start, let tell you a little about myself. I had a wonderful childhood and got plenty of attention from both my parents so you can't blame it on a rocky childhood. I had a wonderful time in high school with plenty of friends and male attention, so don't go thinking I am eating to replace some emotional void. Why is it hard for some people to understand that I simply love food in a society that glorifies a size zero?

Okay, coast is clear. Where are you? Oh yeah there you are...darn it! Just my ipod, yes! There you are. My hand touches the smooth wrapping. I take it out, admiring the shiny wrapper as I tear through it. I take the brown goodness between my fingers and take a bite, savoring the taste. The chocolate melts in my mouth and I close my eyes. Heaven. I open my eyes and realize that I'm still at work. I take a bigger bite and then a bigger, faster bite until the whole bar has been consumed and all I'm left with is the wrapper, a reminder of the calories that just went straight to my thighs. Guilty and satisfied.

"Becks! I knew it. You sneaked in a little chocolate after your healthy sandwich. How are you ever going to lose weight?" Nicole, my nosy co-worker, pops her head into my cubicle, giving me the third degree as usual.

I give her my most innocent smile. "But Nicole! Think of it this way, my bad food for the day is out of the way, I don't have to worry about it anymore. I'll just go home and have a healthy salad like I planned. I promise." I knew I wasn't planning on having any salads tonight, lamb curry was actually on my mind but Nicole could do without this little piece of information.

"Good. Now get back to work and I'll pop round with your green tea in a

while.”

Nicole always remembers my green tea; she thinks it’s the cure to my “disease”. The poor thing doesn’t realize that Sophie, my trusted plant, enjoys the green tea everyday while I opt for a diet soda.

Nicole is a perfectionist. Everything from her designer knock offs to her immaculate hair is perfect. She walks into the office every morning carrying her Hermes briefcase, the only item she ever splurged on, a newspaper under her arm and daily coffee, no foam, skimmed milk. Nicole embodies everything I envy; she’s the model staring back at me with her perfect body and pearly white smile.

I finally close my magazine, tucking it away so I can admire it when I get home. I already know which picture is going to grace my fridge this week but I don’t tear it out just yet. I have this method where I tear a model’s pictures up means I give up and I’m not ready to do that, not just yet.

Finally! Let me just grab my magazines. I walk out of the office without saying goodbye to anyone. Was that rude? I know what you’re thinking: fat girls are always nice, let’s face it we have to because our personality is all we have, but oh no. Not this fat girl. I can’t wait to get to Neiman’s and try that dress on. I hope Gladys is there. Snotty old Gladys. Trust me this is not the fat talking, Gladys is mean. She’s this old hag who’s proud of her tiny waist and rubs it in my face every time.

“Hey! Rebecca, you’re back, let me get that dress for you dear.”

Sure thing Gladys. I’ll just wait in the fitting room. This dress better fit.

“Are you sure you want a size two dear? I think you’d be more comfortable in a four.”

Yeah I’m sure you do, “I’m feeling lucky today Gladys”. The door slams in her face. Oops

“Need help zipping up dear?”

“No thanks!”

Why won’t you zip?! Perfect. That’s just perfect, I’m just gonna take it off; I mean why bother when I know you won’t fit. I reach for my own dress and look at the tag. Size 6.

Contributors' Notes

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Nur Abdelhalim has lived in France and Egypt and is currently a student at the American University of Kuwait.

Kheiriyeh Ahmadi has been on the Dean's Honor List for the last three years at AUK; she is majoring in English Language and Literature.

Zainah Alrujaib is a first year student at AUK.

Tarek Fahmy is a third year student at the American University of Kuwait. He writes, "To be honest with you, I have never in my life published any of my work, but I believe that now is the time and the chance to really publish something in which I spent all my effort on."

Anurag Galhotra is a student at the American University of Kuwait.

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Fatmah Hussain Al-Qadfan has published in and edited for *The Daily Star* and *The Voice of AUK*. She is a junior at AUK double majoring in English Language and Literature and Anthropology. Her sonnet, "White Carnations," was published in *Arabesques*, an internet literary journal.

Haya Al-Qassar is a student at the American University of Kuwait, majoring in English Language and Literature.

Nur Soliman is in her first year at AUK. Her poem, "Let There be Light" was published in an anthology of the International Library of Poetry. "Sunshine and Things" is one of many poems she has written for children.

Dana Taqi is senior majoring in English Language and Literature at AUK.

