

MONSOON MUSINGS

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VOICES
FROM
THE RAIN

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ISSUE I

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Poetry Section

Monsoon

Monsoon arrives,
Grief fills the skies.
Hard to breathe,
The wind carries sorrow, not relief.

We hold each other in pain,
Under heavy rain.
The earth is loaded with dead bodies,
We find no remedies.

Again, monsoon is knocking –
What it brings is always shocking.
Our hearts are heavy with despair,
We cannot escape its silent stare.

--- Rabia Qayyum ---

Rain and Joy

Heavy clouds gather in with a dominant sigh,
Casting dark shadows across the sky.

Raindrops fall on thirsty ground,
Waking the Earth with a soothing sound.

The magic of rain washes the gloom away,
Turning slow hours into a cheerful day

The breeze now flows through every tree,
Bringing in leaves a joyous melody.

The scent of soil – a perfume rare,
Floats through the cool and refreshing air.

Lightning streaks in a sudden gleam,
A spark that feels like a dream.

--- Aatika Asad ---

Cosmic Laughter

Cherishing Festivity

Clouds are ecstatic,

Birds are lunatic,

Trees and flowers are fanatic;

Feeling the aura,

Unaware of nature's tooth and claw,

Celebrating the brutal and beautiful law;

Everyone is in cryptic awe

But a peasant saw

Divine doomsday

Swaying in yay and nay,

Entangled in a thousand layers,

Enjoying, afraid, and full of cares;

Suddenly, he saw the roar of the river

Achiever, miser, and giver

It never spares;

And the poor peasant fears

Hut, cattle, and grain

Bathed and dead in rain

Nature laughs,

The peasant coughs;

And sees the see-saw game

Cosmic flame,

Waiting for divine justice
Hoping for the moon in sun
Hiding in nook and corner
And lastly, after noon,
The poor peasant realized
He is a foreigner.

--- Muhammad Adnan Ali ---

When I Found You, I Lost You...!

I saw you, you took my breath away
And you made me have a prolong stay:
With promising air of swift gay,
You made me dig deep in a delighted sway;
But there was something which nobody knew,
That when I found you, I lost you

What do I do now, where do I go?
What is the answer, why can't you let me know?
I lead a pretty mundane existence,
With little hoary assistance.
But there was something which nobody knew,
That when I found you I lost you,

A ravishing blonde, with misty gazes,
Overwhelms my contemplation, as soon as it raises,
You are a cross word puzzle without the clues,
Which makes me address to the muse.
But there was something which nobody knew,
That when I found you, I lost you

First you make me adulate you;
And then you desert me saying adieu,
You let me stand there in disbelief;
Like a tree without a leaf.
But there was something, which nobody knows
That when I found you I lost you.

You were the sunshine that cradled my day,
You transfigured my life into a mystery play;
You were glimmer in the eye, the blue sky, the sun,
Like two souls thought one, by john Donne!
But there was something which nobody knew
That when I found you I lost you.

What I am, what I was, what I will be?
What will be the out turn of my destiny?
Your attendance makes my day resplendent;
And my nights transpire in transcendence.
But there was something which nobody knew,
That when I found you, I lost you!

Round and round, around I go,
The world is moving briskly but my mind is moving slow;
The people wanted to know how my mind was fabricated,
I told them it was due to being humbly stimulated.
But there was something which nobody knew,
That when I found you, I lost you.

That's life... You are never certain about,
You never know... you always doubt,
Which makes you live not, the vision of yours,
Even you endeavour to make it explore.
And that was something, which nobody knew,
That when I found you, I lost you...!

--- Almas Mazhar ---

The Echo of Rain

Monsoon drifts quietly through corridors of echoes.
When the black horizon witnesses the divine tears
Shattering my burdened heart

Carrying back the warmth of evenings,
Coffee cups – a bridge between our hearts.
The chorus of drops like your soft whispers
Forgotten streets hold the faded footprints of our days

Your tender squeezes
Still drenches me.
Now my hands gather nothing but hollow rain
Entangle me in threads of melodies, immortal

--- Laiba Safdar ---

The First Drop of Rain

The first drop of monsoon kissed the city
The scent of wet earth mixed in the air
They say rain is a romance
But for me, it is a blot
A question
A broken promise
A ghost returning in droplets
I think,
It means flooded drains
Falling roofs, closed schools
Damp pages that once held dreams
It drips from the cracks in ceiling
It blurs the ink of forgotten letters,
Rain doesn't wash away pain
It multiplies it, and paints my city in grey silence.

--- Saba Parveen ---

Rain, Rain, Rain

Rain, rain, rain:

O! Your love is like rain

And my heart, like a plain.

It rains, and rains

Making soft the plain.

The plain is wet

Yet it has no regret.

Musty is the smell,

O! This all is like a spell.

It's all since I felt,

There's no stop yet.

Rain, rain, rain:

Your love is like rain,

And my heart, like a plain.

It rains, and rains

Making the plain a field,

Growing the seeds into grains.

The seeds are sown by you,

The field is owned by you.

On the grains, others are fed;

But the field has no regret

Because your love rains,

Causing the plain to yield

More grains.

Rain, rain, rain:
O, your love is like rain,
And my heart, like a field.
Rain shouldn't stop
Making the field yield
No more crop.
You shouldn't disown
The field, making it moan
As a mere plain again.
Rain, rain, rain!
It should rain and rain,
So that lives the plain.

--- Hafsa Rasheed ---

Rain – A Mirror of Emotions

Falling rain...

Clear and soft,

Slipping off the leaves, drop by drop,

As if it knows every silent emotion.

It appears calm,

But deep down...

It has turned muddy itself

While cleansing others.

As if it made itself a shield,

So that the color and beauty of others

Could remain intact –

The velvet grass, the green leaves, the narcissus blooms.

The dew scattered on petals,

A silent companion of raindrops,

Waiting silently,

For a kind and hopeful touch.

And the breeze?

A carrier of peace,

Carrying fragrance in its folds,

Touches every corner,

Appreciates each soulful effort,
And gently whispers goodbye.

Like a spark of hope,
Travels freely
From one leaf to another,
One tree to the next.

Rain...
Like a loyal friend,
Walks alongside,
Touches every soul
That rules hearts
Through gentle words,
And spreads kindness and love.

But...
Some voices resemble thundering clouds –
Their hearts blackened like dark clouds,
Spreading storms
Through their words.

Such dark clouds
Bring only destruction, chaos and noise.

And when they pass,
They leave behind
Fear, shivers and unrest.
A sudden strike of lightning...

Fills even the dream-weaving, peaceful souls
With fear.

Quivering with their own shadows,
Leaving behind such scars
Of words and tones that
Etch on the soul - forever.

--- Maria Yaqoob ---

Whispers of the Monsoon

Clouds in the sky silver and gray,
Whispering rain is on its way.

Puddles bloom where footsteps meet,
Raindrops weave a song so sweet.

Leaves blow low in gentle cheer,
Cool winds hum that monsoon's here.

The earth feels new,
Wrapped in skies of misty blue.

--- Fajar Hayat---

Monsoon – The Season of Hope

Before the clouds arrive,
The world is a desert of waiting,
Trees stand like prayerful hands,
And the soil forgets its own scent.

As the cool breeze whispers through the air,
Clouds gather, wrapping the sky in grey,
And then without warning,
The sky breaks into rain,
Trees regain their lush green glow,
The scent of earth awakens,
Birds sing in rhythm with nature,
As if the earth itself is smiling again,

Not just the falling rain,
But the arrival of a new hope,
Each drop brings life again,
Turning the barren into bloom once more,
It carries a message, soft yet clear,
Every end begins a new journey here,

So when the clouds return once more,
Don't run, just walk into the rain,
It may not wash away all sorrow,
But it will teach the heart,
To rise again tomorrow.

--- Rehana Afzal ---

MONSOON MIRRORS

(For Ammi – my first sky, my steady ground.)

Heavy, my eyelids–
a sky sagging low
over Punjab's wheat,
swallowing the sun.
Fields holding breath,
waiting for rain's release.

Then the sky cracks–
thunder of thoughts
hammering the tin roof
of my mind.
Outside, our gully drowns,
swallowed whole by rain.

Then–silence.
Skin cool as wind
through July heat.
The jamun tree drips
jewels of rain–
prayers the storm left behind.

Let monsoons rage.
Jamun teaches: sweetness
is born of swallowed storms.
And in the deepest flood,
Ammi's voice, a rope
tossed to my drowning heart.

--- Amrah Ijaz ---

The Devastated Womb

The night wrapped in rain,
Thunder roared—searching for a lost voice.
Every drop of rain falling from the roof,
Was like an untold scream.

Muddy yards, wet walls,
And a shaking cradle,
Like the shadow of a memory,
Whispering in the wind.

A figure...without name,
Sitting by the door,
Holding pain and silent prayers,
Pain seeped in like silent groans.

Laughter came from far,
And inside?
Wet soil, quiet cradle,
And a silent scream in her eyes.

That woman...
Who herself worked on the road,
For bread,
For life growing inside her.

She picked bricks with bleeding palms,
Bore a basket of sand upon her head,
Under the fiery sky,
And then...rain came like betrayal.

Her heartbeat increased,
Back pain, severe pain in her belly,
Water flowed over the road...
But that road was never made for her.

He didn't come,
Nobody knocked at the door.
Night kept breathing,
And put everything to sleep.

The first ray of morning,
Touched the quiet cradle.
In the soil, a flower bloomed,
Without name, wet and white.

Someone had only said:
"This monsoon didn't bring
Only rain...
Also devastated someone's
Womb."

--- Kinza Abbas ---

EMBLEM OF BELONGING

The Locale –

Not only indexed with a label “Gujrat”

It’s an emotion, a sense of belonging, and the entire
tranquility in heart

It’s a breath-giving address that strongly dwells
deep down in the veins, the blessing, the delightful bell
rings the heart back, comfort and calm—while breathing love
to tell

Not a birthplace merely

It’s beyond the quietude and stable serenity, a worth-
embracing locality

where gold the hearts swing, bring and spring together—the
humanity

Land of the divine lovers, the glimpse of immeasurable
kindness—chasing rarity

My place, my way to trace, my forever nicety

The portrayal of beauty, carried in Sohni Mahiwal’s story
the humbleness stored in visage—truly adored in flood after
monsoon—emblem of bravery

It wrenches the soul, the high level of water misshapens the
glory

Yet, the golden hearts, divine hub cures the needy doors,
equip the stuff in monsoon downpour

Time to time, magical brings, divine rings, I graciously
adore.

Praise—

the loyal warriors of Gujrat, the visionary wits, the divine
philanthropists

You feed and heed each in need, you swim and skim in dirt and
hurt—God's light in mist

Peace be yours, passion leaps more, attention always cures.

Peace be with you, my beloved Gujrat.

---Tajalla Qureshi---

Lahli's Joy

A burning day, the sky so bright
The sun was harsh with blinding light.
Then clouds appeared, both dark and deep,
They wrapped the sky, they made it weep.

Small drops first, then showers fall,
Like silver pearls they bless the all.
The air turns fresh, the earth turns green,
A softer, sweeter, lively, scene.

And when the rain has gone away,
One Lahli bird comes out to play.
She jumps in puddles, splashes around,
Her chirping laughter is the sound.

She bathes with joy, so wild, so free,
Her tired wings find melody.
As if her heart, once full of care,
Now sings with life, beyond compare.

--- Naveeda Tabassum ---

The Healing Rain

The beauty of droplets,
the droplets of rain,
the sky brims with water,
and washes the pain.

When droplets fall softly,
they ease every chain,
the troubles of heart,
the worries of brain.

The flowers are blooming,
the fields and the grain,
a silence grows lovely,
so healing, the rain.

The earth breathes its fragrance,
a sweet, soft refrain,
the spirit feels lighter,
refreshed once again.

--- Waiz Ahmed ---

Mourn Soon, Monsoon

over me
a scabbed over sky
the moon nowhere to be seen
perhaps lost
abandoned
or forgotten
perhaps
none
in hand, five flowers
barely asleep
almost awake
never again to see
another purple day
in August
of Wind
a grave, flattened
i let the leeches
kiss my shin
i let them love me
lest salt
rain from the sky
the torch burns my fingertips
i can no longer strangle her
from screaming light
into the night
the whiteness of the road
unfurls before me
not a blur but a blot
a child-spider sleeps inside
the lid of my eye
her burden, my debt

not the other way around
needless to see
slashed her cradle
broken lashes
there
the dogs have barked the moon back
excreted? birthed?
before i'm able to ask
another cloud falls to his death

--- Mus'haf Iqbal ---

Ode to the Monsoon

When the clouds fly in the sky
Unconscious emotions rise high
Wind comes with dust
Leaves of the 'Bohar' tree dance with the gust.
Melancholy darkness appears like night,
Sudden showers burst with fright.
Children start to sing a lullaby
"Kaly baadal ayen gay, a k minh barsain gay."
(Black clouds will come, and they will rain on us)
Childhood echoes through the air
Paper boats start to float,
Half-naked children, wearing the 'Kacha',
Playing in the muddy streets
Everyone is happy and enjoying.
The monsoon's rituals start:
Samosas, Pakoras, and Chana Chaat.
Rainy season is like a blessing tone,
But for the poor, it is a sordid boon.
Monsoon is not cruel like us,
Equally blessing for humanity and nature.
It quenches every field
Water droplets fall from leaves,
And making melodious noise.
The enchantment of the monsoon,
Is multiplied by the petrichor.
Now is the time to enjoy, the time to love.
A gift from nature to humanity is ahead,
Glow of lush land is an aesthetic therapy.
And the sun is still shining,
In the lap of rainbow.
The sun is still shining, the sun is still shining...

--- Mohsin Raza ---

Drowned

The ignition or submerged disaster
caused by the curse of God,
the trumpet blows everywhere,
folks rush for supplications,
to mitigate the chaos.
Sins are paid off, the holy tongue claims,
Do the speechless commit sins too?
Do those lives need to repent?
Or is it for the sins of us?
Do they deserve the perdition of being sunk?
The One who blesses condemns too.
Such defensive folks have drowned
Their conscience and consciousness.

The pasture where spring grows,
sprouts its twigs, and blossoms-
seem to swim like a corpse floating on
a muddy surface.
The spring that awaits the Monsoon for
The rebirth of everything, turned withered
and burned in dazzling heat of summers.
Despite to live up to expectations
what if it eradicates their roots too?

Ridicule to such religious folks
who pray and accuse Him too
for the loss of thousands of lives.
But neither recount human folly,
nor recognize their dereliction,
and the true lies they tell to be believed

to keep our mouths shut.
That's how my "determinism"
sets me apart above all,
my consciousness stirs me up
to speak, to refuse, to insist
against the shit they weave.
But I can
Not.
I'm drowned as well
In the depths of silence.

--- Zohair Hassan Ihsan ---

Equal Drops, Unequal Worlds

Clouds gather like poets,
Writing verses on the sky,
Praising Monsoon as Silver-Threaded Veil,
Painting the rain in tender hue
But here, where roofs are stitched,
With hope and rust,
The rain is
No gentle metaphor
A drumbeat it is, On the thin tin,
A river sneaking through the ceiling,
A cold hand on the back of the neck,
A knock on rustlock with icy hands
Where the raindrops lose their way,
And steal the night's tranquility
Where walls drink rain like thirsty clay,
No one pauses for poetry
They are not Pluviophiles who dream,
Of raindrops in whispering tides
Nor Nephophiles who find bliss,
In drifting clouds on the wings of white
Still, it feels like a secret doorway of grace
Their hearts bow, whispering tearful Thanks
When the rain descends, they breathe the deepest relief,
Each drop, a Mercy upon their burning hours
And so the monsoon comes_
A Blessing in disguise,
A Test wrapped in beauty,
A hymn whispered under leaking roofs

--- Fakhira Shaheen ---

Buner's Cloud Burst

Needs to care for Humanity,
No other thing is as Mandatory,
Poverty and hunger just Scarcity
Let's walk together to prevail the Charity.

The Poor are screaming in the Monsoon's Calamity,
Losing their homes in the Flood's Vanity,
He who lost his family before his Eye,
With thrusting throat trying to Cry.

Who are watching on screens Just,
You can't imagine Buner's Cloud Burst.
Come and join the hands for Humanity,
Hold the rope of Help, say Hush to Insanity.

--- Muhammad Shoaib Riaz ---

Monsoon Buffalo

The buffalo's hide
accepts the monsoon's blunt nails –
a dark, patient stone.

--- Shakir Shahzad ---

Short-Story Section

The Last Drop

By Saba Parveen

The monsoon came. But it did not come like a poem. It came like a punishment. Sewers spat out the filth the city had buried for years. Streets turned into rivers of rot. People still called it "rain." They stretched their hands to the sky, hoping for mercy, but the clouds spat only mud. An old man sat by the corner of the bazaar. His ribs showed through his shirt, his eyes were cloudy like the sky itself. Every year he repeated the same sentence:

"This is the last drop. After this, nothing will remain."

Children laughed at him. Shopkeepers abused him. A mullah said he was a heretic. A politician, passing by in his black car, called him "mad." But the old man stared only at the overflowing drains.

"Rain does not wash the city," he muttered. "It only rearranges the dirt."

The rain thickened. A school wall collapsed. The cries of children died beneath bricks and water. At night, the newsreader smiled on television: "Monsoon has brought a wave of happiness."

But the old man did not smile. He lifted his face to the sky. One drop slid down. Only one. It landed in his eye. He closed it.

"Every drop falls like a verdict," he whispered. "Guilty. Guilty. Guilty."

His lips curled into a smile, the kind that belongs to corpses. By morning, he was gone. His cot lay empty, his rags still damp with last night's rain.

The people searched for him. Some said he drowned. Some said he vanished. Others said he swallowed the last drop of rain.

But the truth was simpler.

The city itself had drunk him, just as it had drunk every hope, every prayer, every tear.

And when the rain stopped, the filth remained.

Because rain obstructs nothing.

It only reveals the obstruction that was always there.

--- END ---

***"Books may drown,
But the Words Float"***

The Sky's Question Paper

By Fakhira Shaheen

It was the morning of second last exam in the sixth semester, and the city woke up under a sky that refused to stop weeping. The rain had begun before the alarm. By the time Ayat lifted her head from the pillow, the world outside was already drowned in gray. The glass of her window trembled with water drumming like impatient fingers. Streets had blurred into rivers; alleys had turned into restless ponds. What kind of morning was this to sit for an exam? And yet, wasn't life itself full of surprise exams—without timetable, without mercy?

She tied her hair into a loose braid, slipped her swollen notes into a plastic bag, had breakfast while seeing rain felling on the floor with silent yet afraid breath and stepped into the storm. The air smelled of earth cracked open, of roots drinking greedily, of sky pouring its restless heart. Each drop fell like a question: Are you prepared? Will you endure? The whole street seemed to have dissolved into water, as if the city itself was being erased and rewritten by the monsoon.

By the time she reached the street corner, her sandals were already drowned. Puddles were not puddles anymore, but small oceans determined to test every step. She laughed bitterly to herself, Maybe Blake should have written about this instead of lambs and tigers.

Ahead, two of her classmates, Sana and Aiman, were wading carefully. Sana groaned, pulling her dupatta tighter around her head.

"Ya Allah, if I survive this exam without pneumonia, it will be a miracle."

Aiman only smiled. Calm, composed, her eyes reflected the silver of rain. Calmness and Satisfaction were shining through her.

"Maybe the storm is an exam too," she said softly. "The professors give us paper, but the sky is giving us another one."

Ayat caught up with them, her bag clutched like treasure.

"Don't make metaphors right now, Aiman. My notes are swimming inside this plastic, and Wordsworth won't save them."

Sana laughed in spite of herself, though her voice shook. "If Wordsworth was here, he wouldn't write about daffodils. He would write about gutter water and broken slippers."

The three walked on, half cursing, half laughing, like unwilling sailors thrown into an unwanted sea.

By the time they reached the college gate, they were soaked through. Their clothes clung to them like seaweed, their hair heavy with rain. The watchman leaned on the gate, his umbrella tilting, and said with a grin,

"Students or sailors?"

His words stung like a careless verse, light yet stinging.

Inside, the courtyard was a shallow lake. Wrappers floated like dead leaves and lost letters. The neem tree stood knee-deep in its own reflection. The girls pulled their trousers high, wading through with squeals and complaints. Did anyone

imagine the path to knowledge would look like this—half river, half battlefield?

Students were everywhere, moving like scattered birds caught in the same wind. Some laughed, hiding their nervousness behind careless jokes. Others cursed the weather, muttering about ruined clothes and slippery roads. But no one stopped; the finals of the sixth semester were not the kind of storm one could run from. It was Poetry today—Blake, Shelley, Wordsworth, Keats, Coleridge—all waiting on the page, though the real poetry was already pouring from the sky.

The exam hall was no refuge. Buckets stood under leaking spots in the ceiling, already filling. Wooden benches were damp, the smell of wet plaster everywhere. Water dripped in steady rhythm, drawing strange alphabets on the floor. Wasn't the ceiling itself writing its own poem, drop by drop?

The invigilator walked in, spectacles fogged, umbrella dripping. He handed out papers with a sigh. "Write quickly", he said, as if racing against the rain. The exam had begun.

The first question stared back at Ayat: "Discuss the theme of innocence and experience in William Blake." She almost laughed. Innocence had drowned the moment they stepped into this flood; experience was dripping from the ceiling above their heads.

Naila, always the loudest in class, groaned every five minutes. "My ink is ruined, my paper is ruined, my life is ruined," she declared dramatically, as though the rain was a conspiracy against him alone. Sana, nervous as ever, shielded her answer sheet with one hand while writing with the other, muttering, "If my paper fails because of rain stains and this fever, I'll sue the sky."

Pens scratched, ink blurred, papers curled and the students kept writing, their words spilling like raindrops across the page.

On the other hand, there was Aiman. Calm, almost serene, she wrote without hurry, her lips curved into a half-smile. It was as if she heard music in the dripping, saw meaning in the chaos. She seemed untouched by complaint. Ayat glanced at her, wondering: Doesn't it take a different kind of soul to write poetry while the world floods around you?

Three hours passed, heavy as wet clothes. When the bell rang, it was swallowed by the storm's roar. Students rose, some in relief, others in despair, but none prepared for what waited beyond the hall. The rain had not stopped—it had grown fiercer. The courtyard was turned into a river. Water lapped against the steps, tugging at ankles, threatening to pull everyone down.

One examination had ended, but another had only begun. How to cross this sea of a city? The questions written on paper felt easier than the ones written in water and rain. How to reach home with notes and bodies still intact? Did the sky even care for their struggle?

Sana groaned, "This is not college anymore. It's Venice."

"And we're gondolas without oars," Ayat added, forcing a laugh.

Aiman looked at the sky, whispering, "It feels as if the clouds are stricter invigilators than our professors."

Their laughter was thin, but it kept them moving.

The road home was no less a battlefield. Rickshaws refused passengers, buses stalled like drowned elephants. People walked, slipping, falling, helping each other. Once, Ayat

stumbled into the mud, her books nearly sinking. A group of boys laughed, while an old woman pulled her up gently.

"Beta, exams will come again," she said kindly. "But you must not let the sky fail you."

The night after the Poetry exam stretched like wet cloth—heavy, dripping, unwilling to dry. Ayat sat near her desk, her notes for World Literature and Translation spread like wounded soldiers across the table. Pages had curled, ink had bled into blurs, and whole passages had dissolved into illegibility. She pressed one page under the weight of a lamp, as though light itself might straighten the wrinkles. But no lamp could iron rain out of paper.

Outside, the city was still singing its terrible hymn. The drains had surrendered, the streets gurgled like throats full of water, and even the electricity flickered as if the wires were drowning.

Ayat's mother knocked gently at the door.

"Beta, enough for tonight. Now take Rest. The city itself has failed the exam of sleep."

But Ayat could not rest. Her thoughts were crowded with Kafka's Gregor Samsa waking as an insect, Camus' Meursault staring at the sun during a funeral, Bulleh Shah's defiance against hollow rituals, Iqbal's cry for selfhood, Rahman Baba's simplicity, Sachal's oneness, Faiz's resistance.

How strange, she thought. The syllabus had never felt so alive—these writers too had lived in storms of their own. Kafka in a world of bureaucracy that crushed men into insects, Camus in a desert of meaninglessness, Sufis in societies that chained truth, Faiz in prisons where poems were written on walls instead of paper. Perhaps the rain was

not destruction, but a translation—life rewriting itself in water.

But then Sana's voice echoed in her memory: "If I survive this exam without pneumonia, it will be a miracle."

And Aiman's voice, calmer than the rain: "Maybe the storm is an exam too."

Ayat smiled bitterly. They were all translators now, translating chaos into survival, fear into endurance.

The morning arrived not with sun, but with another gray curtain. The rain had not paused even for a single breath. There was the reflection of the same day and same experience again but deep down a fear and a pray echoing loudly. It was as though the sky had become addicted to pouring.

Ayat tied her braid again, tighter this time, as though preparing for war. Her books were wrapped in three layers of plastic. She was getting ready like a soldier with determination and Preparation. She stepped outside, and once again, the city greeted her like a drowned ship.

On the corner, Sana was waiting, coughing into her dupatta, her face pale but her eyes still mischievous.

"Did you read about Gregor?" she asked, teeth chattering.

"Yes."

"Lucky him. At least he didn't have to give exams in this weather." They both laughed, but the laughter was cracked.

Aiman soon joined, her umbrella steady above her like a halo. Calm, serene, as though her soul had not even noticed the storm. She was carrying her notes in a single thin folder. "Aiman, aren't you scared they'll be ruined?" Ayat asked.

"They are already inside me," Aiman said, with quiet certainty. **"Books may drown, but words float."**

The three walked together, not sailors now but pilgrims, each step a prayer against slipping into the flood.

When they reached the college, the sight was worse than the day before. The courtyard was no longer a lake—it was a river in rebellion. A group of boys had formed a chain, pulling others across. Teachers waded with their shalwars rolled to their knees. Neem leaves floated like a lost boat.

"Tell me," Sana said, "if Meursault was here, would he still say the universe is indifferent? Or would he think the sky is deliberately cruel?"

Ayat whispered, "Maybe indifference and cruelty look the same when you're drowning."

The hall smelled of wet plaster and unwashed fear. Buckets had multiplied since yesterday; now they stood like sentries catching the leaks, their metal throats echoing with steady drips. Benches were still damp.

The invigilator entered again, his spectacles fogged, his expression more resigned than yesterday. He looked at the class as though they were passengers on a sinking ship, and he merely the one tasked to hand out life jackets too thin for the storm.

He passed the papers. The heading read:

"World Literature and Translation – Final Exam, Sixth Semester."

The first question:

"Outline and critically analyze Franz Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* as a text of alienation and transformation. Translate your understanding into your own cultural context."

Ayat's heart jolted. Alienation and transformation—weren't they all living that already? Was she not Gregor Samsa, waking to find herself turned into a creature fighting floods instead of offices? She began to write, her pen scratching against paper that swelled with humidity.

She wrote of Gregor, but she also wrote of herself: of a student carrying books in plastic bags, her humanity tested by puddles that swallowed streets. She wrote of how transformation was not always wings or monsters—sometimes it was simply growing strong enough to step into storms.

Beside her, Sana sneezed violently, yet her pen darted furiously, perhaps writing of absurdity, of Meursault who refused to cry at his mother's funeral. Ayat imagined Sana writing, "If the sun could burn Meursault, then rain could drown us. Both are exams of existence."

And Aiman—oh, Aiman sat like a saint, her half-smile unbroken, her answers flowing as if dictated by the rain itself. Perhaps she was writing of Sufis—of Bulleh Shah who refused to bow before hollow rituals, of Rahman Baba who found purity in simplicity, of Sachal who declared, "I am neither Muslim nor Hindu," of Faiz who turned prisons into classrooms. Perhaps Aiman saw no exam paper at all, only another chance to translate storm into song.

The exam hall was no refuge, but it was a battlefield, and each student fought with ink instead of swords.

The hours dragged like soaked cloth, each minute heavy with the weight of dripping ceilings and restless pens. By the time the final bell rang, it was swallowed—again—by the roar of rain outside.

Students rose not with triumph but with exhaustion. Some clutched their answer sheets as if they were lifeboats;

others dropped them with careless relief, convinced the storm had already graded them harsher than any examiner.

Sana sneezed again, pulling her shawl tighter, muttering,

“World Literature, Translation, and Pneumonia. That should be the course title.”

Ayat almost laughed, but the fatigue in her bones was stronger. She looked at Aiman, who was gathering her papers with the same calm, as though she had spent the last three hours in meditation rather than examination.

“You didn’t even flinch once,” Ayat whispered.

“Why flinch?” Aiman smiled. “Exams end. Storms pass. But what we learn—sometimes it is written deeper than ink.”

Ayat frowned. “And if the paper gets ruined?”

Aiman shrugged lightly. “Then the sky marks us instead.”

The girls walked out of the hall together. The courtyard had transformed once more. If yesterday it was a lake, today it was a restless river, swallowing shoes and ankles alike. Umbrellas bloomed like fragile flowers, though most were useless against the sideways wind.

The watchman at the gate chuckled, repeating his joke from the first day:

“Students or sailors?”

But his voice was softer this time, almost reverent, as though he knew—these drenched, shivering figures had fought battles larger than exams.

The road home was less a road and more a translation of chaos—water translating earth, sky translating itself into streets. Rickshaws were stranded like broken shells. Buses groaned, their wheels were half-drowned. People clung to each

other, strangers sharing umbrellas, shopkeepers pulling students onto dry thresholds, children splashing with the defiance of innocence.

Ayat, Sana, and Aiman held hands, wading together. Sana's cough rattled like a broken engine.

"I swear," she muttered, "if Camus was here, he'd say this is proof that existence is absurd.

But I'd throw my slipper at him before he finished the sentence."

Ayat smiled tiredly. "Maybe he'd smile back and say you've proven his point."

And Aiman—she looked upward, her eyes steady despite the storm.

"The absurd only wins if we surrender," she said quietly. "Faiz wrote even when the jail cell walls were dripping. Bulleh Shah sang when the world was against him. Perhaps the sky is not cruel. Perhaps it is only asking: will you sing too?"

They walked on, their laughter and complaints weaving with the rhythm of rain. Once, Ayat slipped, nearly falling, but a stranger's hand caught her—a young boy, no older than twelve, grinning through the downpour. "Careful, baji," he said. "Books don't float like boats."

His words stung, yet comforted. She thought of Gregor Samsa, of Meursault, of the Sufi poets—all voices reminding her that the human story had always been about falling, and being caught, and rising again.

By the time Ayat reached home, her clothes clung like second skin once again, her notes were swollen to twice their size, and her body ached as though she had wrestled with the sky

itself. She collapsed onto her bed, staring at the ceiling where droplets traced uncertain maps.

Was it over? The sixth semester—the long river of nights, books, and questions—had ended not with neat closure, but with chaos. Yet wasn't that truer to life than any timetable? Who said exams must always end in silence and order? Perhaps the greatest test was learning to write while ceilings leaked, while shoes drowned, while one's own spirit felt as fragile as paper.

Her mother entered with a towel and a steaming cup of chai. "It's finished now," she said softly. "Rest."

Ayat wrapped herself in the towel, her mind still echoing with words she had written: alienation, absurdity, defiance, translation. She realized suddenly—they were no longer just texts. They were her story, her city's story.

Gregor Samsa's transformation was hers, too—the ordinary turned into the unbearable overnight.

Meursault's indifference had stared at her in the sky, yet she had chosen laughter instead.

The Sufis had whispered through every drop: truth is not in safety, but in surrender to meaning beyond walls and storms.

She remembered Aiman's words: "**Books may drown, but words float.**"

Yes. Words floated. Across rain, across time, across cities that failed to prepare.

Outside, the rain softened at last, as though the storm had grown tired of its own fury. The streets still gleamed like silver rivers, but the horizon showed a faint bruise of light.

Ayat closed her eyes. For the first time in days, she breathed deeply—not in fear, but in strange gratitude. Exams would come again. Storms would come again. But she had learned something truer: the test was never the paper. The test was always endurance.

And hadn't they passed?

Days later, when the results would arrive, the papers stained with watermarks and blurred ink would still carry their words. Professors would shake their heads, mutter about ruined conditions, but grades would be given. Some would be high, others low. Sana would laugh at her pneumonia, Aiman would smile at her serenity, Ayat would hold her certificate like a trophy pulled from a flood.

But long after grades were forgotten, one memory would remain:

"A city turning into a sea, and students refusing to drown."

Because sometimes the strongest poetry is not Blake, or Wordsworth, or Faiz.

Sometimes the strongest poetry is simply this:

To keep walking, drenched, laughing, trembling, yet unbroken.

--- END ---

The Tent of the Forgotten

By Haseeba Kanwal

The last monsoon hit Mandi Bahauddin as a punishment of some hideous act that was done consciously or unconsciously by its inhabitants. It wasn't a mere rain; it was a verdict written on water that befell from the sky. For days, clouds had gathered like conspirators, and when they finally burst, they turned the green city into a dusty, stinky river.

Now two weeks had been spent, though the water drained into the lower lands but the major area of the city was still muddy, shabby and somber.

Sarmad left the bus and walked alone, under the foggy sky. His bus had stopped miles behind, and he was soaked in the shy rain

He looked in his surroundings and as far as his eyes could see in adversity, the shop vendors had turned off their lights out of o the fear of theft and street lights were mostly out of order - as usual in the city. There was no one in sight, not even the shadows who might appear if any single street light was working.

Then, through the blur of rain, he noticed a fire flickering inside a vast, empty plot. He was drawn towards it as if by instinct. He paced towards the light. When the vision gets cleared, it was an abandoned plot which was spread over several acres at the back ran a railway line, while the front opened onto a road that carried the city's dirty water straight into the plot, turning it into a murky lake of waste and humanity.

Inside that flooded pit stood a few tattered tents of the *Changars* – people without maps, names, or mercy from the world.

An old man raised a trembling hand. "*Aa jao, baarish sabko mehmaan bana deti hai,*" he said. Come in – the rain turns everyone into a guest.

(A drowning man clutches at a straw) Sarmad quickly ducked under the tent flap.

As his eyes got adjusted with the darkness, a miserably surroundings were wailing right before his eyes, he took some time to believe at which place he was standing and among whom? The *changars*, literally???

He glanced at his shoes, they were stuck in the ground. There were three *charpois* and one steel trunk behind a curtain. The old man asked him to sit on a *charpoi*. The *charpois* stood on long wooden legs. Their blankets were wet, and heavy with sour and reeking odor.

On the opposite *charpoi*, five children sat shivering, those who had *kamiz* wore no pajamas, and those who had pajamas wore no *kamiz*.

A woman served me with a hot cup of tea, she had hollow eyes that didn't move; perhaps she was too tired to hope.

The old man sensed my restlessness and said softly,

(Hum shehr walon ke beech nahi rehte, unke neeche rehte hain. Jab wo apna pani nikaalte hain, hum doob jaate hain.)

We don't live among city people – we live beneath them. When they drain their water, we drown.

Sarmad looked around. The tent was shaking in the wind like a paper heart. The world outside rumbled with the thunder, bulldozers, and human indifference.

He felt a strange silence bloom inside him. His inner self whispered,

The moon and stars are watching you coldly, Sarmad. Even the heavens had grown indifferent.

He remembered his reports, he had done many researches on the poverty, on the poor and their livelihoods in his polished words, Urban Poverty Mitigation, Rural Rehabilitation.

But that night, he was sitting among them, on whom he had carried full-fledged researches without knowing their hardships. The people with no resources, scarce food, and minimal clothes. A wave of shame hit him hard as he realized how many times he had walked past them without even noticing. He had always thought of himself as kind, someone who understood the suffering of others. But tonight, he knew just how empty those thoughts had been.

He was overwhelmed by these thoughts and unknowingly slipped in the arms of sleep.

When dawn broke and the rain stopped. Sarmad rose at the chattering of the children, who were eating the crumbs of the leftover breads they had begged from city houses. He scanned around, but found no traces of the woman and the old man. A cold shiver ran through him as he realized where they must have gone, begging, their only way to survive.

Sarmad checked his pockets and gave each child a note and stepped out.

A child's slipper was floating over the small pit. He shook his shoes in that little pond to remove the dried mud of them. He turned to the tent, his one-night shelter, and then returned toward his destination.

For weeks he tried to get rid of the very thoughts of those people, he tried to divert his attention, he tried to lull his consciousness by saying "They are *changars* and that is their fate". But with the passing of time his restlessness

grew more and more, therefore he decided to visit them and help them with some money, as a repayment of the hospitality they had offered him.

He stepped off the bus, reached the plot, but there were no tents, he stood there in disbelief, Desperately, he ran to the road and asked a tea vendor, "*Yahan kuch log rehte the – Changan log?*"

The man stirred his kettle, indifferent. "*Kal hi bulldozer aaya tha. Malik Builders ki zameen hai. Sab hata diye gaye.*"

Sarmad turned. Above the murky land, a giant billboard smiled:

"Malik Builders – Luxury Living Begins Here."

The words gleamed like mockery in the soft morning light.

The memory of children, the old man, the woman and that hot tea clung to his consciousness, a stubborn reminder of lives that no city ever cared to remember.

As he walked away, the sun hung pale in the misty clouds, watching him the way cruel gods watch the damned, with distant fascination and no mercy.

Nature had been merciless to the poor, but the city – the city was worse than all.

It had learnt to flood only the poor, it had learnt to punish only the poor, it had learnt to erase only the poor.

He heard someone whispering,

Perhaps the rain doesn't wash sins anymore, it only rearranges them.

--- END ---

Drama Section

After 70 Years

By Dr. Farrukh Hameed

(i)

(A man in his 90s sits on the bank of a stream, thinking about his entire life. He dreamt of living a luxurious and happy life abroad. He has achieved the goals he thought about. He can feel a gust of cool breeze coming from the stream, a breeze he couldn't think of in his busy and laborious life. He can claim that he is a successful person.)

Flashback

(A room of a poor family. A boy in his twenties argues with his parents.)

Iqbal: I cannot work in this country. The youth like me do not have a scope in this corrupt, selfish, and nepotistic society. I will be a broken person if I stay here anymore; no jobs, no opportunities, and no future. I do not want to ruin my life here, Abu.¹ *(he looks to his right side.)* I want to become a success story, Ammi² *(he looks to his left side.)*

Father: *(with a heavy heart)* Beta³! You are the only son out of three we have now *(he looks to his wife)*. Your elder brother was killed in a shipwreck while crossing Greece through a dunky⁴. The second is sick due to the use of drugs. God knows whether he will survive or not. You are the only son we have with us *(he looks to his wife again)*.

¹ Father

² Mother

³ Son

⁴ Illegal border crossing

Mother: *(suddenly interrupts the conversation of Father and Son)* Yes, Beta! Our future depends on you. You are our only asset. Why don't you work for something worthy of living in this country?

Iqbal: Ammi! It has been two years since I graduated with my degree in engineering. I tried in several companies and positions, but all demanded experience. My question is, how would I get experience if they would not give me a chance to work? I work on tiny positions which were not according to my education. After so many rejections, I have decided to go abroad.

Father: Beta! I lost my one child in a dunky, I cannot lose another.

Iqbal: *(convincingly)* Abu, I am not going to try any illegal way. Great news, I would like to share with you that I have got a fellowship in the USA. I will study and work there for a couple of years. I will earn well and return to Pakistan after completing my degree. It will boost my career here. You know, people and companies in Pakistan love to hire professionals who are foreign graduates.

Father: Beta, Beta! What about us? What kind of life will we spend without you? You are the only hope of our future.

Iqbal: Abu, I will send you money from the USA. I have won the fellowship that can easily fulfill my needs in America, and yours here. And don't worry! I will visit you every year.

Mother: *(Abruptly)* But Beta, how will we survive here without you? God knows how many more years we will be in this world. Our physical health does not allow us to live alone. Your father has heart issues, and I am a diabetic

patient. And you are leaving us in these bad health conditions. Your elder brother has been hospitalized for the last five years due to drug addiction. He has tried to commit suicide twice, according to the doctor.

Iqbal: Come on, Ammi! My bright future is calling me. Don't be a hurdle between me and my future. It's only a matter of several years. It will change our status and lifestyle. I want to get rid of this poverty. I did try to get a job here, but all my efforts were in vain. Failures after failures led me to take this decision. Believe me, it was not easy for me either. I have a brilliant chance that I cannot lose now. My whole life will fail again if I don't accept this offer. I will regret it throughout my life. I am not going to lose it in any way. This is my final decision. That's all.

Father and Mother: *(look at each other)* Okay, Beta! What can we do if you have already finalized your options?

(ii)

(A café bar in the city of the USA. It serves halal food items, especially ice cream, burgers, pizza, etc. One can see the hustle and bustle of Asian and Arabic Muslims who often visit the place. It is owned by an Arabic Muslim named al-Hasan from Yemen. Iqbal has been working here for the last four years.)

Iqbal: Jenny, I have been living in the USA for the last five years. I have witnessed a lot of ups and downs in this country, which is altogether different from other countries. It took me at least one year to adjust here. People react differently. I think, hardest thing is to understand the people and their cultures in a new place,

especially the USA, which is a multicultural country. People around the world migrate legally and illegally. I was lucky who get a legal visa and study here, and graduated last month. I had an interview with a company and they have offered me a reasonable job of 8000 US dollars monthly.

Jenny: *(She is his class fellow and colleague at the café bar. She was attracted to Iqbal since he got first position in his second semester.)* That's awesome. I'm gonna celebrate it. You've a dinna tonigh from my side.

Iqbal: *(with excitement)* So nice of you, Jenny. Sure, I'll celebrate it with you. To whom will I celebrate if not with my best friend? You have always been with me whenever I felt nervous and awkward throughout my academic career. You are my emotional strength. I am always grateful for your encouragement and motivation.

Jenny: *(Blushingly)* Come on, Iqbal, anything for the friends? OK, then see ya in the restauran. I'll pick ya up from yo apartmen. Bye. *(She passes a flying kiss to Iqbal for the first time in three years.)*

Iqbal: *(couldn't understand this gesture. Hesitantly)* Bye. See you tonight.

(iii)

(Both Iqbal and Jenny sit in an Arabic restaurant.)

Jenny: It's na easy to ge halal foods in the USA. We are lucky that we are livin in Michigan. We can find some Arabian and Asian halal foo items in this state.

Iqbal: Yes, Jenny, you're right. I travelled throughout the USA for conferences and academic purposes, and I had

to rely on shakes, fruits, and snacks most of the time. Occasionally, I carried homemade items baked by myself.

Jenny: (*waiter appears with menu card and goes to another table*) Iqbal darling, it's your treat, so select the dishes for dinner.

Iqbal: (*again surprised by Jenny's calling him darling. He couldn't understand why she was behaving romantically tonight. He glances over the menu card.*) Jenny, you're fond of biryani⁵ and hummus⁶ So I'm asking for these items.

Jenny: (*over-excitedly*) Yup, anythin'. I like everythin' that belongs to ya.

Iqbal: Ohhoho! I have been noticing your changed behavior since the evening. Is there anything special you want to share with me? (*A waiter appears with two glasses of soft drinks again.*)

Jenny: (*shyly*) Well, Yeeeeees! I have, but after this drink.

(*Iqbal finishes his drink. He is quite astonished to see a ring at the bottom of the glass.*)

Iqbal: (*surprised*) What's this, Jenny?

Jenny: (*takes the ring from him and makes a stance on her knee to propose to him.*) I love yo, Iqbal. Will yo marry me?

(*Iqbal is beyond his words. He hardly utters words.*)

Iqbal: There's nothing dearer to me than you in this world, Jenny. How can I say no to you? I love you too from the bottom of my heart.

⁵ Asian dish

⁶ Arabic dish

(They hug and kiss each other.)

Jenny: *(Romantically)* This is the most beautiful and elegant moment of my life.

Iqbal: *(Responds to her emotions)* Jenny, you've made my life, previously as a friend, and as a life partner now onward. I'll remain yours till my last breath.

Jenny: Thank you, Iqbal. I wanna tell ya my real name tonight. My name is Jannat, and I'm an Arabic American.

Iqbal: *(surprised again, but excited this time)* Noooooo! Come on, you didn't tell me before.

Jenny: Iqbal darling! I'll make yo life Jannat in this world.

Iqbal: *(stunned)* I didn't know you were an Arabic American.

Jenny: No one knows about it in our class. I concealed my identity. You know the overseas male students are after the girls who own a green card, and the same is the case with girls. They want to get an American green card. It's the easiest way to be an American. I appreciate that you accepted me without knowing my background. You don't need a work permit now. We'll get married and apply for your green card.

Iqbal: It's quite astonishing for me. I don't know how to react in this situation, but you know me very well. I'm not a person like that.

Jenny: Yes, my darling, so I've selected you. Another great news! I've also been hired by the same company that hired you. We'll work together.

Iqbal: That's mind-blowing. You're such a mystery. How many more secrets do you have?

Jenny: *(Smiling)* You'll know it with time. Let's enjoy the dinner.

(iv)

(After 70 years. A lavish house, Iqbal and Jenny sit on the bank of a stream. Iqbal talks about his past.

Iqbal: Jenny, this house was my dream. I always wanted to get a luxurious life with a rural context. I used to visit my grandfather's village in my childhood. He was the most respectable person in the village. My father had to leave due to his job. My father couldn't recover his good health after the death of my elder brother, who lost his life while crossing the Greek border illegally.

Jenny: *(taps Iqbal's hands)* Sorry to hear that.

Iqbal: My family collapsed after that incident. My father did try to get a new job, but remained unsuccessful. At that time, I promised myself to be a successful person. I studied and studied well. I had a lot of rejection in the beginning, but I didn't lose hope. Finally, I got an opportunity in the land of hope, prosperity: the one and only, America. I studied hard and worked with great loyalty, got a fantastic job, and a lovely wife *(smiles on both sides)*.

Jenny: You're such a success story.

Iqbal: Thanks, Jenny, for being a part of this journey. We have our children who are living their lives happily with their families. One is a doctor, practicing in Philadelphia, the other was married to a Pakistani American businesswoman, living in New York, the younger is an IT expert, living with her husband in Los Angeles. I'm proud of them *(suddenly feeling sad)*.

Jenny: Wait! You never talked about your family. What happened to them (*in a serious tone*)?

Iqbal: (*sadly*) Jenny, I left my parent in a bad health. They were facing heart and diabetic issues. My brother committed suicide in an anti-narcotics hospital. I can still feel the pain of my parents. At least, they had him. They called me to return, but I couldn't return to Pakistan due to my academic routine and career progress. I was climbing the steps of my success. I was extra curious, cautious, and mad about my future. They kept on waiting for me, Jenny (*sobbing*). One day, I received the news of the death of both. Their last word was my name, 'Iqbal', Jenny (*crying, he lay down in the lap of Jenny.*)

Jenny: (*taps him*) Be brave, Iqbal!

Iqbal: (*crying*) Jenny, I can feel their agony at how they spent their lives without me. I must have been with them. I couldn't observe even their funeral ceremony. I paid a visit to their grave. I asked their forgiveness. Will they forgive me, Jenny? Will they forgive me? (*crying*)

Jenny: (*feeling the pain of Iqbal*) Come on, Iqbal, you're a brave soul!

Iqbal: No, Jenny, No! I'm not. I feel our children will also receive a call of our death, one day. Will they observe our funeral ceremony? (*crying*)

Jenny: Come on, Iqbal, what are you thinking about?

Iqbal: After seventy years, I think about my life and question myself, am I a success story? Tell me, Jenny, am I a success story? I've got everything now. I left my

parents alone and am living without my children now. Am
I a success story? (*sobbing*)

--- END ---



***Monsoon does not merely fall —
it remembers.***

*It seeps into rooftops and poetry,
into the ink of forgotten letters,
into the eyes of children waiting,
and into the hearts of those
who walk back empty-handed.*

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