

SOLITUDE AND COMPANY

SYEDA ERUM NOOR

The emptiness in all its glorious necromancy
Falls prey to silence and its sole command.
Presence of mind is what fuels insanity –
Solitude and company, victims of blooming romance.

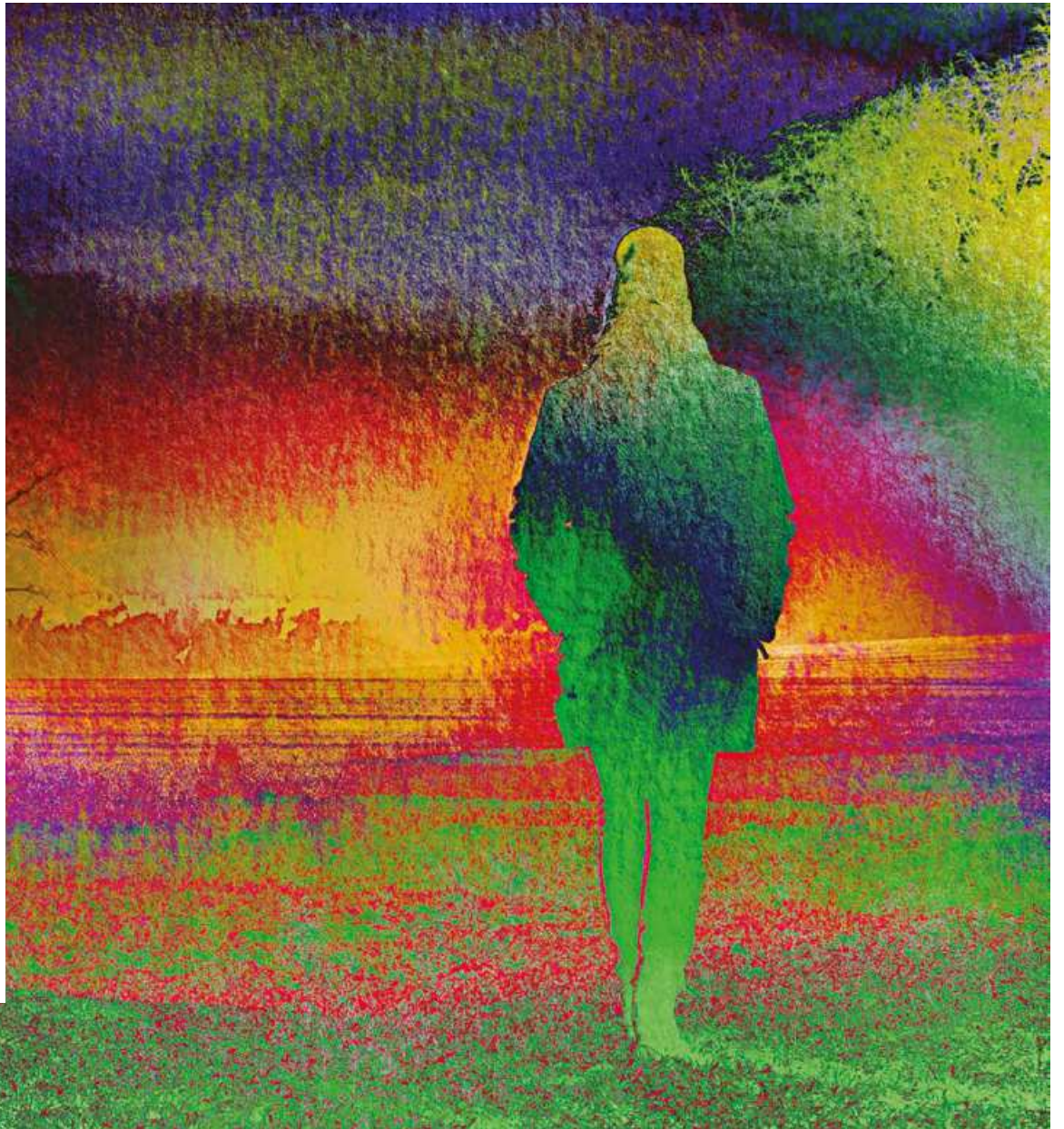
For can one truly exist without the other?
Tongue paralysed from your smoky, cider scent,
My noisiness however has me rediscover
The stains on white plaster, awaiting your advent.

The quivering stillness and throbbing calmness,
With the serene storm brewing in its wake,
Brings warmth in its gaping, white solace
But leaves the ground to rumble and quake.

Fleeting thoughts in darkened skies
Are best expelled from heart and mind,
For stewing in its compromise,
Keep you inclined to feigned mankind.

For solitude and company
Never thrive exclusively,
Both having authority
Over you and your hostility.

Syeda Erum Noor is dangerously oblivious and has no sense of time. Send help at erum.noor1998@gmail.com



NEW GAME OR EXIT?

OSAMAN BIN AHMED

Brash life decisions, addiction, and a life of crime led Al to where he was now; bleeding on the side of the motorcade as his car was left destroyed. There, laid a feeble Al, on a pool of shattered windscreen glass and fresh blood. The shards of glass pricked through his skin and his shattered ribs allowed no movement. His head flopped; Al gazed at the speeding truck that had seized his life. Tears trickled down his cheek in reminiscence of his actions but he had no God to ask forgiveness from. He turned his head and gazed at the night sky as the light of the moon began to dim and his whole life flashed back through his mind...

Al drew his last breaths as his consciousness drifted into a cold, silent, yet uncomfortable abyss. He had lived for as long as he remembered. Al started to think about all the religious sermons he had missed as a kid and asked himself, "Is this the afterlife?"

A brief few moments later, Al transitioned into a more familiar state – his physical one. He felt strange, with a hundred questions flooding his mind as he found himself in a confined tunnel around three metres across, similar to an MRI scanner. The machine, in fact, was a prototype that could simulate any reality by manipulating the neurons of the brain and by also sending the test subject to a virtual world and to any timeline, whether a real one or fantasy. It was aimed to push virtual reality gaming to its furthest boundaries.

A dozen wires untethered as his body was trayed



outside. A man dressed in a white lab coat took out his steel headband as he joked and said, "You are dead. New game or exit?" The others, similarly dressed, laughed in

euphoria as their revolutionary prototype would soon make its way into the market. One of them handed Al a glass of transparent liquid and he could feel his energy rejuvenating. He felt claustrophobic and made his way out of the room.

The rays of the sun hit his face as he rubbed his forearm and looked at the glass top of the multi-storey complex. His head ached tremendously as he tried to recall his life here. He looked around the building of what seemed to be a tech exhibition. Much to his amazement, he could see not a single being who was old. Upon enquiring a booth, he learnt that humans had overcome ageing decades back with CRISPR and the internal and external organs would undergo no such degradation with the passage of time. They could only die of accidents such as fatal injuries. He was dumbfounded and asked himself, "How long was I asleep?"

He walked through the exit and looked around – the civilisation seemed to be around a century advanced from the one he knew. His head felt dizzy again and he wobbled on the middle of the road, eventually falling hard as a car hit him from the back. The injury sent him to coma, a one-way door for him where he would never return.

Or would he?

Osaman is a curious mind always wondering about AI, simulations, theoretical physics and philosophy. To discuss nerd stuff mail him at osamanbinahmed@gmail.com