

EDITOR'S NOTE

"In order to find yourself, you need to get lost in the forest of life."

-- Mike Dolan --

This was the theme of the Second SLR Writing Competition. The multitude of submissions presented a variety of interpretations to "Lost and Found". Poems and short stories alike dealt with issues relating to physical objects, human values, global points of contention and so on.

Here are the winners of the competition in both categories. Entries have been edited for formatting and grammatical purposes. The panel of judges credited them for their originality, command of language, expression of thought and new perspectives.

Enjoy the read and Eid Mubarak!

MUNIZE MANZUR

WINNER (SHORT STORY)

Transfusion

ZAKARIA AREFIN

Tonnes of rubbles crash in front of Agaz, but he doesn't stop. He takes a sharp turn and runs out of the fumes. Screams and explosions are everywhere around him. But he can't stop. His legs are aching, his hands are losing strength, his eyesight is hazy with the dust, but he will not stop. He grips the blood bag tightly and jumps over a heap of wreckage. Scanning the area, he tries to ensure that he is going in the right direction on the barely recognizable road. Then, he halts all of a sudden.

A crater has replaced the entrance of the hospital. Black smoke is rising from the back of the building. The hospital has been hit? Mariam?

"MARIAAAAM!" Agaz screams. He starts running again, making his way around to the back entrance of the hospital. He can feel the warmth of the blood in the bag. He can feel Mariam just as warm, just like this last night when the shelling began. Streams of people push past him out the door, but Agaz manages to get in. Why people are running out of the hospital? Agaz has no time to think as he almost flies to the 3rd floor where he has left Mariam.

"Mariam?" Agaz screams in despair again, seeing only bloodstains on the floor. "Where is she?" he pulls on the coat of a running medic.

"We don't know. Nobody knows. The hospital has been hit. We are evacuating...it's such a mess!" Mariam?

Agaz stands like a statue with the blood bag.

Lost!

He slowly leans down on the floor and touches the bloodstain; this is where Mariam was lying before he left to bring the blood, required for her surgery. He gently touches the floor, tears streaming.

"We need A+ blood here!" Agaz is jolted back.

"A+ blood! Bring some A+ blood!" A rumble of relatives pass by him. Agaz stands up slowly; he walks towards the direction of the call. Is that Mariam? He rubs his eyes, his heart racing a thousand beats, as he heads towards a lady lying on the floor, surrounded by medics.

"Oh, you got the blood. Great!" The medic snatches the bag with 'A+' written in bold.

Agaz is silent. He can see another man holding Mariam's hand. He stares as the woman's face changes from Mariam to someone unknown. The blood bag is now hanging beside her. The transfusion has begun and life is returning to the motionless body. Agaz stands numb.

Mariam?



1st RUNNER-UP (SHORT STORY)

A Hidden Box

MARZIA RAHMAN

As a little girl, Mira dreamt of becoming a queen one day. She lived her days playing the part of a captive princess waiting for a prince to rescue her from the clutches of demons. At night, she would lie in bed dreaming the same dream. Her childhood was all about fantasy – a mesmerizing world of kings and queens, palaces and prisons, princes and dacoits.

As she grew up, her dreams started taking a different shape but in her heart she still waited for a prince, this time a real one; riding a real vehicle. At eighteen, life seemed wonderful. While reciting Sukanto's poem on this age, she could almost identify herself with the narrator. Sukanto called this age 'incredible and perilous' when people 'neither fear nor despair'. Nothing seemed unattainable. So were Mira and her dreams. Though at times the crowd of choices made her a little uncertain, a bit perplexed; undecided between

wanting to be a politician, a painter, a writer, a poet, a teacher or a social worker.

Baba lovingly called her, "Amar Pagal Meye."

Ma would wonder, "Ki hobe?" Friends teased her, "You and your dreams."

"Yes, yes, I know!" Mira would reply giggling, "They are as wild and unpredictable as monsoon rain."

And now, a homemaker, mother of two, Mira can spare little time for dreams. Some nights when sleep eludes her, she feels she is still imprisoned – in an existential prison from where there is no escape.

Life seems static, resembling Pozo and Lucky's life in Beckett's "Waiting for Godot". Like Pozo and Lucky, she realizes the utter futility of her endeavor and how pointless it is to struggle because nothing really changes.

Amidst the endless chores of household, bringing up kids, carrying out the illusive task of pleasing

everyone, she packs all her wishes in a box. Whenever any of them try to surface, she hushes them: Not now, this is not the time, not the place.

Admittedly, some days she feels like breaking out. Like Virginia Woolf she does not want to move or to speak. She wants to rest, to lean, to dream. She dreams how one fine morning like Radha in Purobi Basu's, "Aronthon" she will do nothing.

Finally one day, she resolves to bring out the box. Nothing drastic – just to peer into the box and bring out a hidden desire, two dreams, a few naïve wishes. The box seems to glow as if thousands of stars are hidden inside and the moment she opens it, it will surely burst into flames. She moves to open the lid.

"Ma, babu is beating me."

"Mira, see what your kids are up to."

"Mama, I am hurt."

Mira rushes off, leaving behind the box.

2nd RUNNER-UP (SHORT STORY)

My Abba Knows How To Swim

NUJHAT KHAN

My Amma keeps on crying, and she keeps on telling me that Abba has drowned in the flood. But how can Abba drown? He knows how to swim.

Once we were on a boat on the River Turag. I was a big boy by then so Abba decided to give me a bag to hold, but I accidentally dropped it into the river. I think the bag had a lot of money in it. That's why Abba immediately jumped into the water leaving Amma and me alone on the boat. Amma slapped me for not being careful, but before she could hit me more, Abba returned to the boat. He was soaking wet. As soon as he got back on the boat, Amma took the bag and checked its contents. Amma was happy to see the bag intact and I was happy to see my Abba. He looked like those white men on television which I see when I peep into the next door bricked

house. Those white men bring out big fish from the water, but my Abba brought out our important bag. Abba was my hero.

So Abba knows how to swim. But Amma keeps on crying. Our tin house has collapsed because of the floods and all our belongings are lost. Abba will probably come back after getting them. All that I'm worried about is my rickshaw tyre. I love to play with it. I want to go back home but Amma says that we'll go after the water recedes.

Amma is crying and saying, "Allah should take away mothers instead of fathers. How will I earn money? How will I buy rice? How shall I look after little Imran?"

How can adults like Amma be so wrong? If Allah takes away Amma, who will cook rice? Who will feed me? Who will bathe me? Abba is always out the whole day.

After two days, Amma and I can finally go back to the spot where our

home has collapsed. I see our neighbours trying to retrieve their belongings. Amma looks around for something salvageable from the debris and I search for my tyre. Hours seem to pass with little hope. I'm sure Abba can find it when he returns.

"Your Abba will not come Imran! Your Abba will never come!" cries Amma. She starts beating her forehead in despair.

The sun is about to set. I see my Abba walking towards us just as the Maghrib Azaan starts. Seeing him, Amma hugs Abba and tears of joy roll down her cheeks. Abba is crying too.

"I thought I would never see you all again," he says.

"Amma thought you were dead. She forgot that you could swim." Abba smiles at me.

We have no shelter over our heads, but I am happy that the three of us are together after so many days and happier because Abba has found my tyre for me.

WINNER (POETRY)

MY NOTEBOOK

Dr Syed Abdul Kader

Years before I lost
The last notebook I kept.
Poetry, science, innovative attempts kept,
Inked down, unkempt,
Legible or illegible, handwritten,
In diagram, in cryptography.
I lost the book.
Searched for it, searched for it,
And gave in.
Then years after,
On a sunny summer day
Drenched in sweat,
I found a scientist and poet
In a book, like an ancient scribe,
As I describe...
White pages got golden
Like the scripts of the olden days.
It was my notebook,
It was my scrapbook,
I found it in a book shop,
In a quarantined shelf, kept afar, kept atop.

1st RUNNER-UP (POETRY)

WHAT HAVE YOU LOST OR FOUND?

Farhina Hoque

What have you lost or found?

I lost my trust for the people of this world;
I found people are monsters in guise;
I lost my faith in humanity;
I found animals have more compassion;
I lost my tranquility seeing people die everyday;
I found there is a place called 'heaven' waiting for them;
I lost the meaning of morality;
I found mankind destroying its own nation;
I lost my faith in the established laws;
I found laws and lawmakers are corrupt;
I lost control over my anger;
I found it is time to speak up!

I lost my believing in the world;
I found believing in me was enough;
I lost the desire to make my life deluxe;
I found people around more destitute;
I lost the meaning of happiness;
I found happiness in saving a person's life;
I lost myself to know the meaning of life;
I found life was nothing but a maze;
I lost myself seeing the tyranny of this world;
I found we could still create bliss;
I lost myself to make this world a better place;
I found 'i' can never make this happen – it needs to be "us".

2nd RUNNER-UP (POETRY)

LOVE RULES

Mohammad Shafiqul Islam

I don't lose my self
As you shine.
Love rules -

Comes the unknown knock.
I travel spaces.
You exist elsewhere -

I don't like to write
'Loss of Love'.
A Mirage allures -

You kiss me bye.
Poetry stumbles.
I seek my soul.