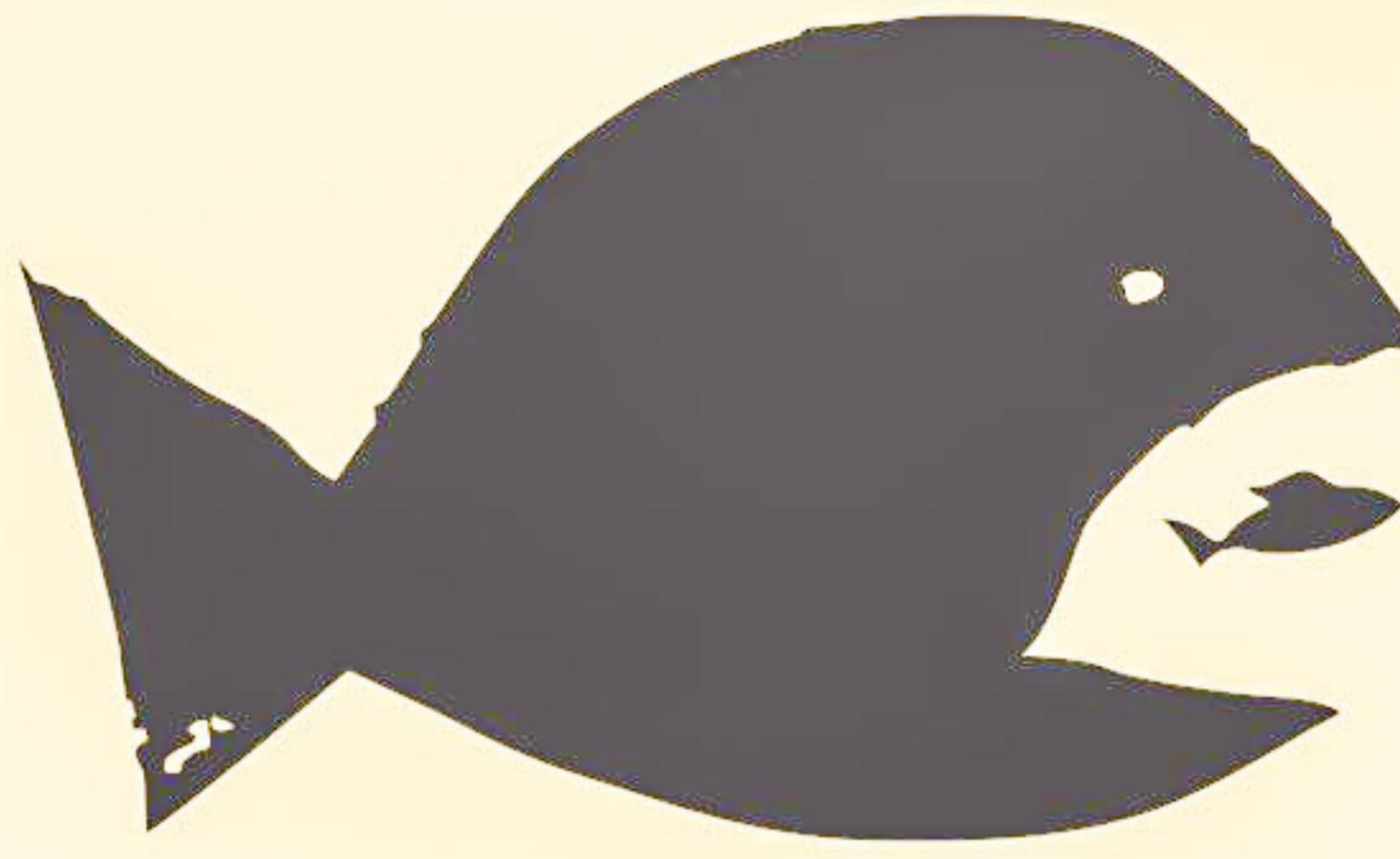


## FABLE FACTORY



## Price of Defiance

ADIT HASAN

The dog arched its back and yawned. The fire from the cooking pit provided reprieve from the biting cold. A temporary luxury allowed them as a reward for compliance and good behavior. The dancing flames reflected on the blade he clutched, making it glisten as he turned it over, examining it. Every fibre of his being screamed to throw away the loathsome object, but he knew he couldn't. Jamal's order was explicit and there was no room for loop-holes or misinterpretations.

The dog had been a friend to him. Accompanying each other in captivity, in otherwise complete solitude, trust had grown between them. She had no name. She didn't need one. Neither did he for that matter. Not anymore.

Three days ago one of his captors had come in with food. His heart wrenched when he realized that he was in one of his nasty moods. Something must have happened, and the captor decided to take his frustration out on him. But the dog had protected him. Relieved as he was about being spared from yet another scar, fear of what he knew was coming soon clouded all other emotions. Jamal had ordered the dog killed. Not only that, he wanted him to do it. He handed him the knife and said he expected to see a dead body when he came back in the evening. He knew there was more to the decision than just retribution. Jamal wanted to break him. To whittle away at his will power and defiance until there was nothing but loyalty, paralyzing fear and submission left. He eventually realized that he placed the dog with him in the cell for this sole purpose. And it was working. When he gave the order and waited for a response, the prisoner couldn't do anything but nod his acquiescence.

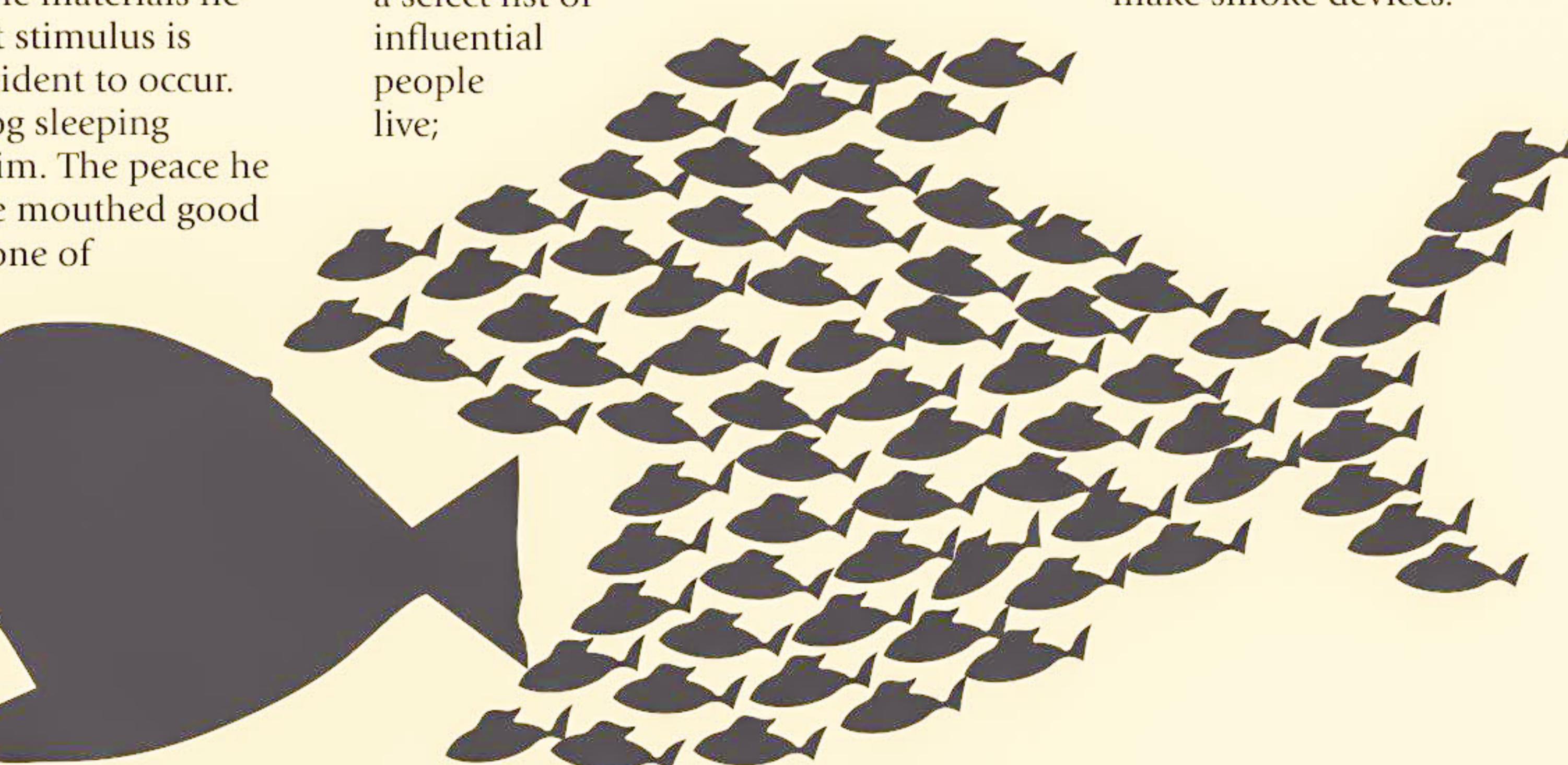
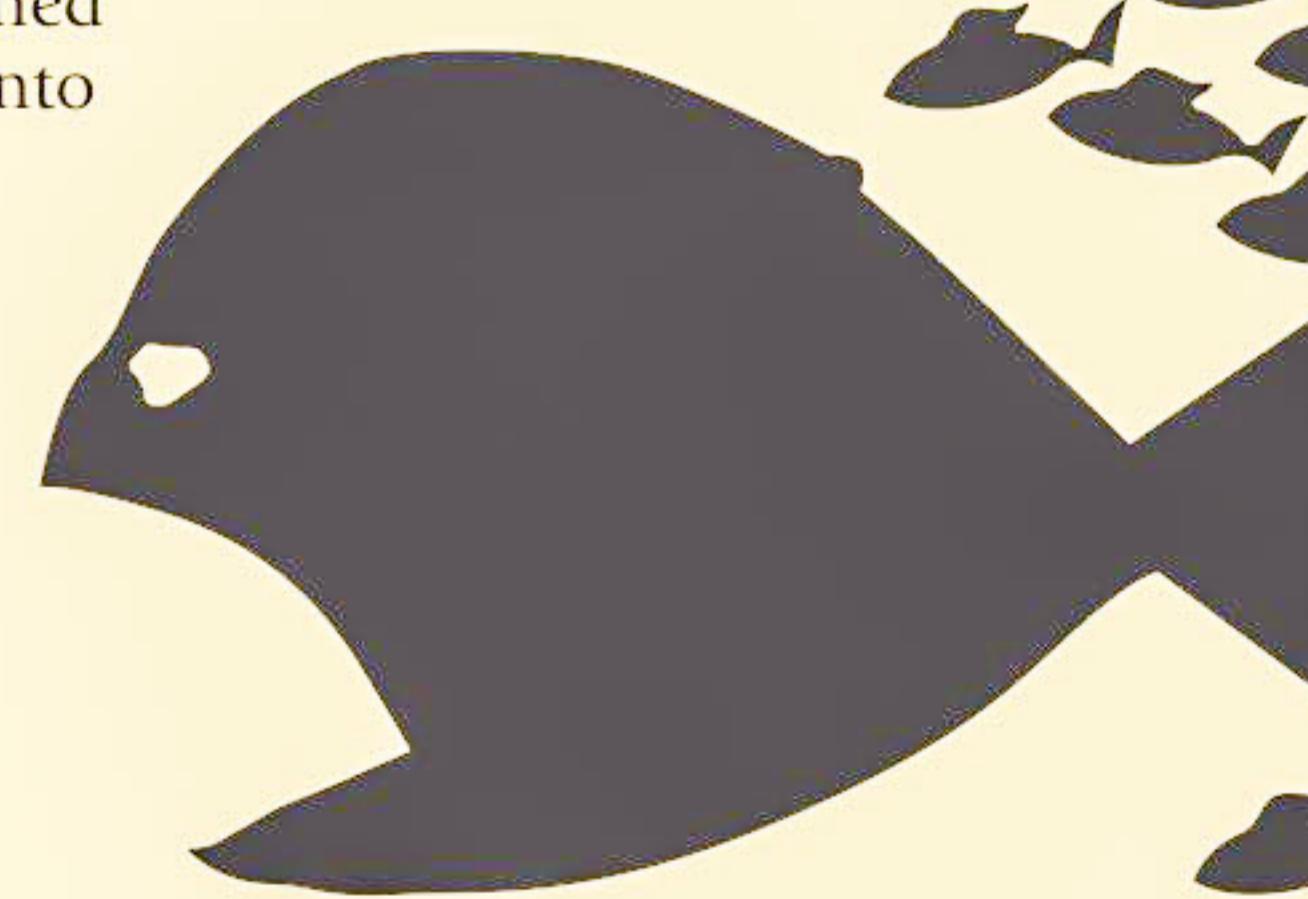
How low he had sunk. From the unyielding, unrelenting beacon of change to the whimpering, cow-

ardly shell of a man he is now. He had refused to conform to the norm, to be weathered by the flow of the masses, he had refused to submit. He vehemently fought against the growing tide of religious radicalism growing everywhere. He had been very vocal with his opinions, too vocal it seems.

He knew the explosives they were forcing him to make were going to be used to murder, to instill fear in the masses and to take them several steps away from the peace he had envisioned for his people. He contemplated suicide every waking moment of every day; there were no shortages of ways to die in his cell littered with explosives. But Jamal had hung up pictures of his family around the walls to remind him of the stakes. How he regretted his actions, how fervently he prayed for forgiveness and how he wished for an end to the maddening grief that left him so hollow.

He couldn't continue. Deep inside the shell still lived the spark that drove him all his life. He couldn't be responsible for any more lives, he couldn't live on in isolation while his only friend died by his hands but most of all he needed the voices to stop. He wanted silence. He needed silence.

With substances as temperamental and volatile as the materials he works with. A slight stimulus is sufficient for an accident to occur. He turned to the dog sleeping peacefully beside him. The peace he craved so dearly. He mouthed good bye before tossing one of the finished bombs into the fire.



MALIYAT ANIQA NOOR

Jail is so familiar that I have ceased to bother with its messy appearance. Here day and night - the very passing of time - is lost to a fluorescent white constancy. Pacing its stingy dimensions I muse, letting my thoughts make madness from memory.

Memory: reading, and reading some more. Observing and listening. Vehicles burn, the hapless poor burn, innocent children burn, and hope: it burns to ashes blown away by a rich man's breath. A political tragicomedy and spectators choose protagonists; reporters in a frenzy to add numbers: numbers in death or numbers standing behind a banner to protest the deaths; the rich agonize over their inability to leave home and the poor agonize over their inability to remain home; meetings are held and marches are organized and Facebook statuses are updated; and nothing seems to be doing anything. Everything just burns and we stand in line to photograph the fireworks. I feel utterly helpless and oddly frightened.

Madness: the plan makes me happy. First step: locate where a select list of influential people live;

learn how to make smoke devices with timers; make the said smoke devices; scout locations; plant devices, leaving threats to do worse next time; boom. Shake the ruling class into action against the actual terrorists. I feel like a hero until I am caught and sentenced to Jail. I feel utterly helpless and oddly frightened.

My maid comes into Jail and declares that lunch has been served. She is much younger than me, she should be in school, not pressing my school uniform and serving my lunch. I amble out of Jail and fetch my lunch from the dining table, setting it beside my laptop. I chew on puffed rice and greasy pumpkin as I think about my next status update. Shall I denounce the barbarism with passionate hate or shall I inspire people to snap out of their lassitude? I am young and educated; I am powerful. I must speak up.

Is there anything new for me to say? Is anyone even listening?

If only I could get out of my jail, if only I could make those smoke devices. Then what? Nothing. I shove some more rice into my mouth and accept an invite to attend a human chain. In a new tab I whimsically search how to make smoke devices.