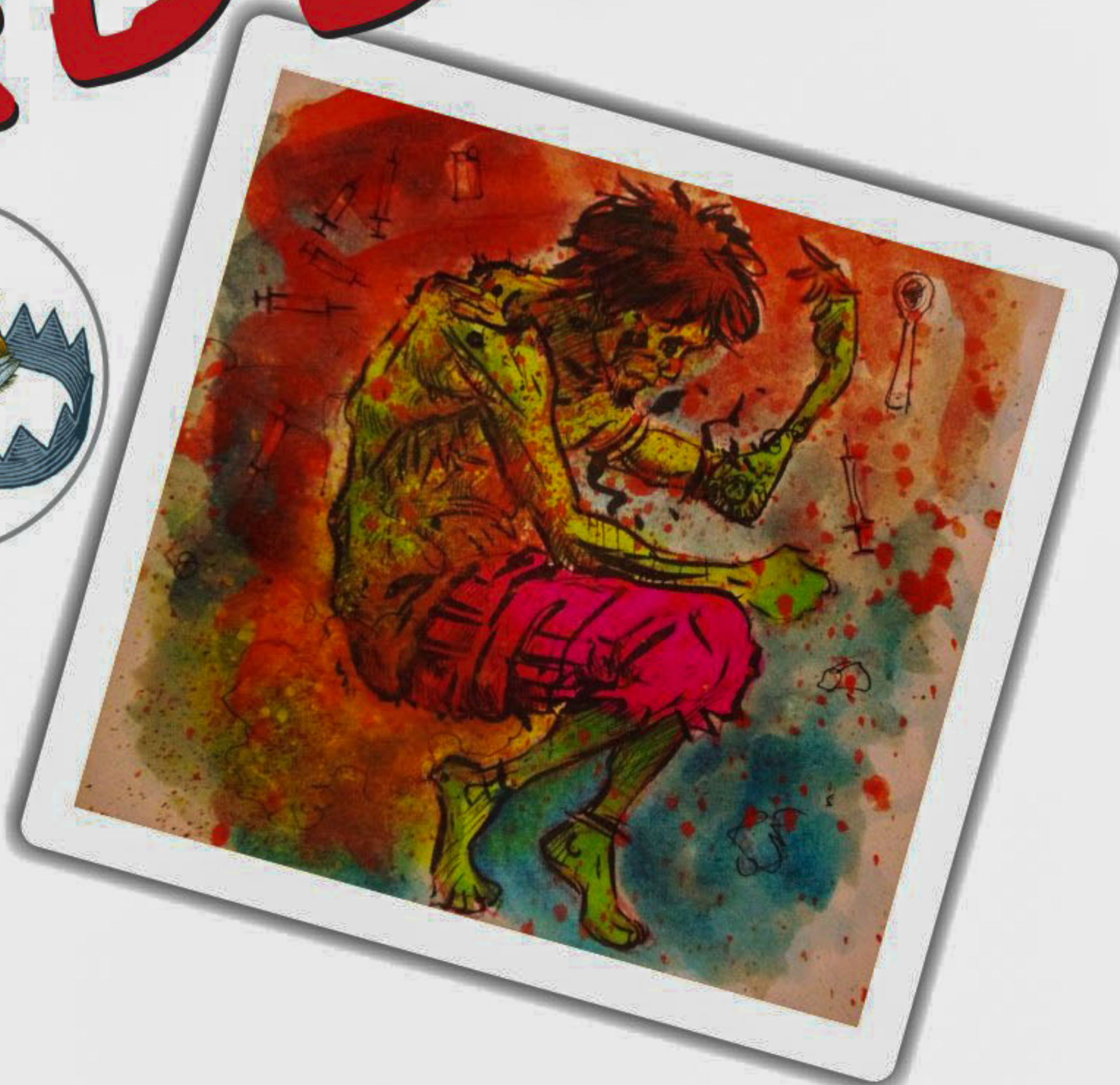
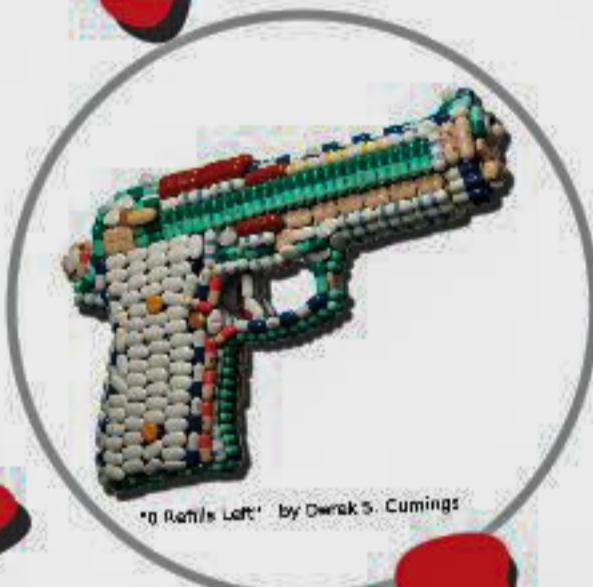


NIBRAS WADUD KHAN

Farheen no longer tried to hide her ruined mascara. That was only one of the innumerable things her brother had done wrong, trifling in comparison to some of the offences. A piano lay in the corner, covered in dust.

# OUR BROTHER, THE ADDICT



## SHOUT

Abba had just finished reading.

"I think this one will be good. This one WILL help him. Let's try it."

She had just returned from a seminar on how to deal with an addicted family member. Although she had stopped going to these a while back, the request of a trusted counsellor compelled her to attend.

She had heard nothing new though, and the seminar only served to remind her why she had stopped going in the first place. The only promise this one bore, she had handed to Abba.

"But none of the earlier..." Abba paused, cleared his throat, and continued. "None of the earlier ones worked. So, I don't see what the rush is."

Abba's eyes moved between her face and the pamphlet in his hands, fixing on neither. They seemed to search for a miracle somewhere in between.

"He is not clean, Abba." Ammu flinched at the words.

"Ishraq is not clean and here, he will relapse. This centre is new, they have good facilities. They can help." The words, alien to her, left her mouth and seemed to make the air heavier. Abba's mind finally found something to fixate on.

"Rehabilitation clinics are rarely effective." - Farheen first read this, choosing not to believe it then, until experience had finally made the lesson stick. But, she doubted she could handle the emotional upheaval that such close proximity to Ishraq would bring.

She was a washcloth; a washcloth that wiped Ishraq's mess, over and over again. And when it was wrung, out came life - her life - dripping down and spilling over; irrecoverable.

Farheen recalled how she had caught her younger brother smoking weed one



Her words fell on deaf ears, but she cared no more. She had been caring less and less over time. At first, the guilt did all it could to help Ishraq. She tried everything, did everything, sacrificed everything, but the addiction was stronger than every emotion felt. Soon, her brother's addiction became a part of her life, destroying every fabric of it, as it did so, to Ishraq.

She was not entitled to her life any more. She feared asking for permission from her parents to go to university events or sleepovers at her friends'. Then, she had to drop a semester when rehab fees were prioritised over tuition fees. And finally, she had to quit piano lessons, when it was longer 'financially feasible'.

She needed Ishraq away. On the day of his last birthday, Ammu had put on old home videos of Ishraq. He was at rehab at the time. Emotions were raw. Mother and daughter held each other, watching baby Ishraq learning to swim.

She loved her brother but it had been hard to forgive him for a lot lately. His strength, when clean, had inspired her countless times. When clean...

"Well?"

"Umm..." Abba was cut short.

Junaed had entered the room.

Young Junaed was still not old enough to be present in these talks. Years back in fact, when chaos swept through their home, it was confusion that had knocked on Junaed's door and curiosity answered.

It was their house-keeper, who had first explained to Junaed the situation involving his brother. He understood little,

and luckily for him, he never cared.

Ishraq was always the idol, his big brother. Ishraq taught him cricket and FIFA and how to paint. His brother was his role model, regardless of what he smoked, or whether he was at rehab. He once brought a few drawings for his brother during a visit, when Ishraq's rehab was still in its early days. Ishraq had hung them by his bed, which had made the artist proud. Later on though, the artist's brother went on to use those drawings as rolling paper.

"What is it, Junu?" - Ammu inquired. Junaed never much saw the pain in his parents' eyes. He only occasionally saw their tears. He heard stories of how their middle son, a young art prodigy, had dropped out of school; how he was never home, how he was always at 'clinics.' Sometimes, he heard how their middle son was a drug addict. But he always saw forgiveness in their eyes. And he saw love.

"Ammu, I'm hungry."

"Go, Junu. We'll be out soon for dinner." It was his sister who replied.

Junaed had, however, seen the pain in those eyes. He thought he had also seen shame, as forgiveness slowly started wearing away. He saw the gradual transition of his sister, when it came to matters regarding their brother. He saw the love lost, scattered along the five year road of Ishraq's addiction; some lost at home and some away, some lost in paper and some in pills, some lost in each rehab, and some in each accompanying relapse. If only his little hands were big enough, strong enough, to pick up all that love lost.

"So," Farheen began again, "What do you say? He needs this."

Her parents were quicker to forgive, and quicker to love. Now, they had no words. Ammu finally spoke.

"Let him stay till the weekend. We will take him there on Friday."

Hopeful doctor-to-be and lover of murgi roast, Nibras Wadud Khan spends his free time stalking you on Instagram. So DM @niibbzz