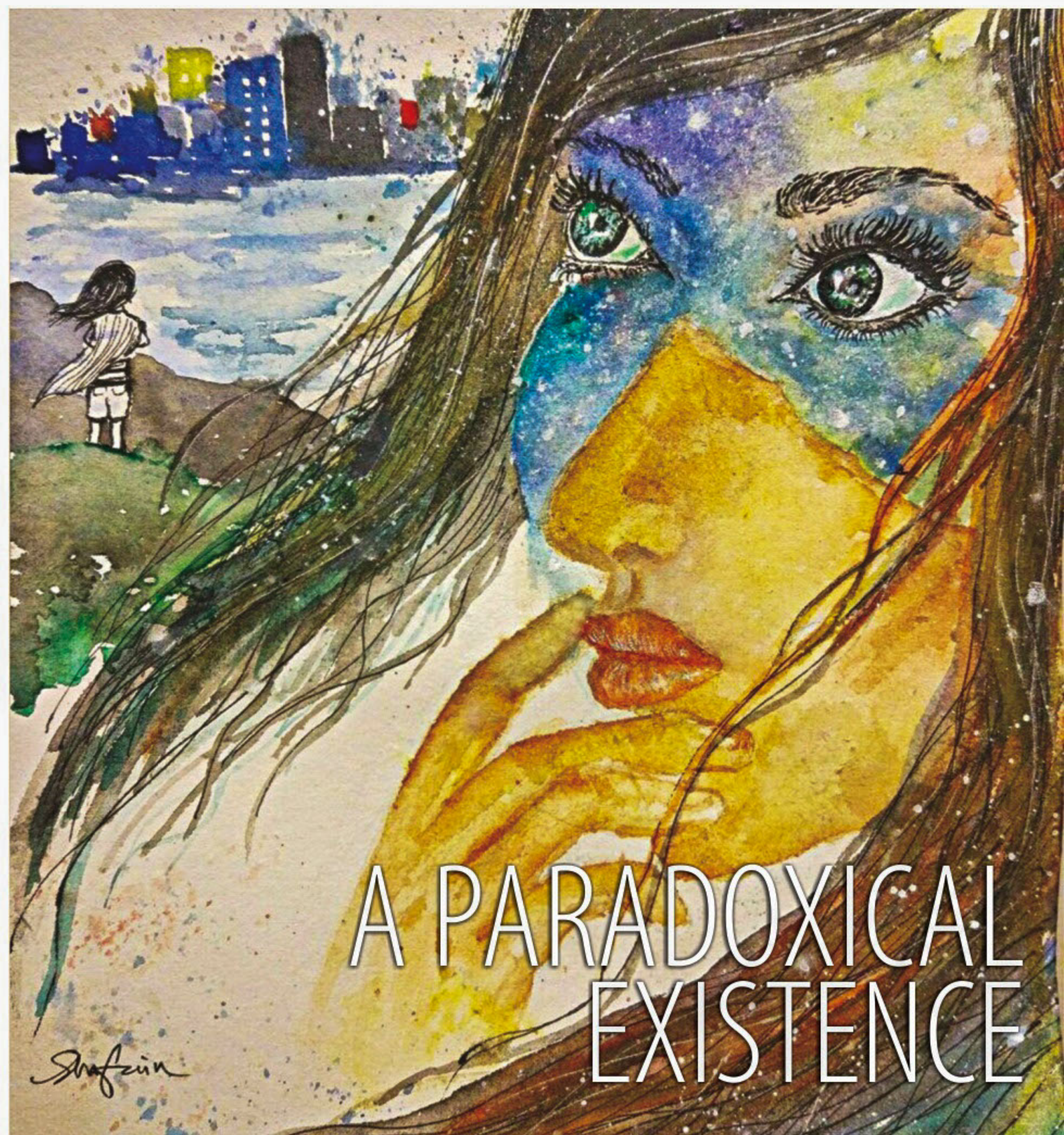


# How I Learned About Starlight

FATIMAH AKHTAR

There was a tradition in my village  
That was believed to be as old as time  
We gathered and watched lanterns as they lifted off to the sky  
Mimicking starlight, they became wishes of my people  
Lifting up then burning out with the flames itself  
My mother wrote her wishes on leaves hoping they'd surpass the stars  
She wished that they'd go somewhere even farther  
To a world, stories of which strangers had told her  
But to no one else did that world live  
It was an imaginary land for our people somewhere too far to exist  
But my mother painted it before my eyes and into my shaking hands  
It lived between my ribs, and on the height of shoulders  
As I learned the meaning of Mercury from her  
Of its red, its shape and it's ever burning fire  
She also told me stories of Jupiter  
She told me of its large being and shape,  
Making me promise never to shrink away  
Never to cut out part of me to fit into places I don't belong  
But the moon was what she talked of the most  
The one deprived of light  
The one that lived in the shadows of the sun  
And only in that shadows did it burn  
So did my mother somehow  
In her were lanterns brighter than what had ever touched the sky  
She was the sun itself.  
And I burned and learned under her of a world far from that  
The one which I knew of  
Where there were four walls not stars  
A broken ceiling fan to make up for many moons  
That had been long gone  
The one that I had to get away from  
She would sing to me  
Just as she wished her mother sang to her,  
Told her stories of the sky and the sea  
Told her that it was completely alright to just *be*.



TASNIA CHOWDHURY

I ran through the waterways and my rhapsodic spirit was high enough to jump over the palisades. Then I escalated the mountains to saunter the nearby valleys and show everyone my rise in prominence. The flowers bloomed and the leaves shed off the dribblets as I meandered.

The sky greeted me with fulmination and soon my heartbeat overtook my speed. The smell of wet mud wafted through my nostrils while my skin crumbled like a house of cards. Drenched in rain, I kept proceeding over the puddles while my feet became distressed of my obduracy. There was a sense of chaos in the air and soon I stopped feeling my legs. My red fingers became phlegmatic and my senses insensate.

I stumbled upon a pond and let my

indomitability lose in front of my weary eyes. I kept running without knowing what I was running away from until I witnessed my reflection. The green eyes in the pond saw everything from society's panorama. The smile widened and tears rolled down the cheeks only when others sanctioned to vent emotions.

The mind got used to functioning like a robot and responding to the quintessential norms of mankind. I realised what I was running from as I stared blankly into the benumbed waters. I sat down forlornly on the ground not knowing what to do. How can one run away from oneself? How can stop being society's contrivance? The tarnished reflection reminded me of a forgotten self now injected with necrotic materialism. My hands twiddled my smidgens as I hoped for the grass to get greener on this side.

# THURSDAY RAIN

SADIA TASNIM TUBA

Thursday it is again.  
Malicious clouds coalesce under the friendly sky  
And greet the icy sheets of rain!

I am standing here at their silent amalgamation.  
With a purple umbrella; trying to disdain my mighty slash.  
Suddenly I remember as it is Thursday, there's no rush.

Raindrops knock at my window sill.  
Sleeps are gone; I gaze at the chasm of my life bridge.  
I wonder! If I were not born, how I would ride on this nature wheel!

I see the lightning sky is torn; sprinkle its broken desires.  
And often I get sunk by the true essence of pluvial tent.  
That takes me to the whirlpool of immense contentment.

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