



## TIME IS OF THE ESSENCE

FARAH MASUD

Manchester just called  
Says there was an attack  
I console her  
Through drowsy mumble  
And say, "Time difference."  
She understands,  
And hangs up.  
I fall asleep, almost instantly.

In my dream,  
I hear the screams  
The pleas  
The cries  
All the way from Syria  
I explain to them,  
"It's not in my hands."

When I wake up  
And step outside my door,  
I notice the mailbox  
Overflowing with postcards  
Letters  
Notes  
From Somalia  
*Are you coming?*  
*Please do something*  
I write back,  
"It's not possible"  
"I live all the way here."

I head out for work  
My phone beeps  
A text from Sundarban  
*My plants are being murdered*  
*The animals are barely breathing*  
Will you save us?  
I type back,  
"I can't"  
"I've got so much work."

When I get off the bus,  
I see a bunch of kids  
In front of the office  
They don't call  
Or mail  
Or text  
They silently gaze at me  
With starving eyes  
And broken smiles  
*What about us?*  
*We're right here.*  
Right  
Before  
You.  
And I say  
"Time of is of the essence"  
"Please step aside."

# The Secret Garden



# ONE STEP CLOSER

ZARIN REZWANA

The framed pictures hung from the wall, filled with smiles – all of the faces captured the mark of happiness. The children stared at the pictures with awe. These people – they were smiling, and doing the most outrageous things.

The children looked wide-eyed at the pictures – people were outside without their oxygen cylinders and cannulas, some were around a fire, sitting in a circle, sitting on the ground at night.

"Don't they have homes?" a child asked – the teacher, a grey haired lady all but smiled.

Leia was staring at a photograph for a long time – the people in it were of her sister's age, she could guess. They were in a large swimming pool, with water splashing around them. She wondered how people could afford so much luxury, after all, she remembered the nights when her dad came home with only a pint of water, and ran out of money to buy food. Those were the nights when dad had to spend all his income on the small bottle and they had no solid food – artificial cereal wasn't much but it rendered you grateful when you couldn't afford it. Dad said that the black liquid had to be refined so that we could drink it, and that's why it's so expensive. She kept on wondering about the opulence that these people in the photo were able to devour, whereas they barely made ends meet.

She moved on, the next picture sparked jealousy in the five year old, as she heard her stomach grumble at the sight of the apple, the lady in the picture was taking

ASHFIA NUR TUI

My little garden talks to me  
About his green grasses and yellow daffodils.  
My life I have been serving him  
And have been loving all his tiny things.  
When the sun comes up with its sour lime light  
It makes my garden even more beautified.  
The buttery pink flowers glows  
So chic and shiny that anyone's heart would be glorified.

Here is where my lover says every day  
"You only saw the exterior part of me which  
depicts I am a happy person. But ask yourself,  
have you ever seen me in the inside where my  
heart craves for digesting your love within its arteries  
and rebels in vain to break free of my body,  
to get out and catch a glimpse of you to fulfill  
It's thirst?"

My eyes glimpsed on yours  
my tears had fallen like the sacred water  
and my answer was.

"When I see, when I love you  
every second of my breath  
I don't only see your exterior  
but your interior too.  
My heart is pierced by you, my lover  
it was weak, my heart  
Your love taped it so strong by that it now keeps me alive"

Oh my little garden thanks to you  
for your warm, lime lighted grass  
it keeps me warm in my lovers  
chest, even my sins seems to be pure.



ILLUSTRATION: RUMMAN R KALAM

a bite out of. It was red, and looked scrumptiously juicy – like the ones her teacher described in fairytales. Ms. McGonagall mentioned that the weather was too harsh here to grow apples, and they were nothing but a rare delicacy since the trees couldn't survive in the current weather. Leia remembered eating apples a few times – on one of her birthdays, and once when a very rich man visited the school. Ms. McGonagall said he was a multi-trillionaire, and had made a donation of one apple for each student in the school. They always got the nutrition supplements delivered home at the beginning of each month so that no one got sick, but Leia couldn't remember the last time she had a full meal.

She was scanning through the photos, in awe, and in astonishment as to how the people in photos lived such lavish, extravagant lives – with water and food in such abundance, they never thought once about people like Leia, did they? Her sister always complained how the world would have been a better place with clear blue skies and happiness only if the others could have salvaged something for them; alas, they didn't.

"Now, now, children! Put your cannulas on! Our trip here has ended, and you don't want to get sick when you go outside, do you?" Ms. McGonagall announced.

The children obeyed. It was time they headed back to the school, through the smog. After all, the kids in year 3017 had an assignment to write about what they thought life was like a thousand years back, after the trip to the museum ended.