

MAHIRA TAJ

I don't speak from my heart
The things which cannot be said.
I notice them with my brain,
The little things.
I'm proud of myself, for my bruises,
The way the soldier is proud after war.
The winner is the one who's dead,
The winner is not the one who's bereft,
But despite the circumstances
Of society's trivial stances
I'm happy I made it out of the war, with wear and tear —
Alive and scathed.
But such things are to be left out of view
By the more mundane, the few,
I've learnt to cry because it is expected, not because I might be,
Mildly,
Effected.
A maiden's face is glass,
It is useless if shattered, inexpensive
If cluttered, with the rest.
And compared to other ones
It is easier to set back and watch,
When others bruise themselves and repair,
A hearty comment, surely
A discussion
Between Adults
Of the importance of visuals,
It really doesn't affect me.
I'm crying because it may effect others.



A Queen's Game

MAISHA NAZIFA KAMAL

She rolls the dice and it's a seven,
In a game of chess, like an ace of spade.
She counts all the daggers you throw at her
And repays them with a dazzling smile and fresh blood.

A crown of Alexandrite, amethyst and azure,
A sceptre of gold, studded with silver,
A throne wrought with the iron of valour,
And an eye of ruby become hers in a glimmer.

When she walks, she erases all traces
Of the places she's seen, of all that was left.
When she smiles, she veils your amazed eyes
From arrays of tricks that await your demise.

A queen barely needs a title or fanfare
Yet her grip of power is an embellishment.
She won't let anyone call her "Your highness",
But will drag all with a leash down the trenches.

So beware, when you see such women passing;
Witches are fairy-tales but queens are not.
They are deadlier than the venom you know of,
Care to mock them, and they'll write you off.

I'LL KEEP YOU SAFE

WASIF HASAN

In a small building, underneath the bright red sky, a woman stood looking out the window. She wore a very tired expression on her face. Someone who had seen so much of the world at its worst times and felt like she had enough of it. But there was still one thing that acted as an anchor for her between this world and insanity. It had been almost fifty years since the chaos began and the whole earth was left reeling from its consequences. Entire cities destroyed whole, the government declaring martial law and blocking off all the streets, people being executed if they stepped out of line. Mankind was a disease that was wiping itself out. It was a greedy parasite that never stopped exploiting its own resources until none of them remained. Now, there was barely anything left. She remembered father telling her this once before he left. That it was only a matter of time before it happened....
A sound of something falling came from behind her.
The toddler sitting on the edge of the bed had dropped his small teddy bear. The woman smiled and picked it up. The child took it and resumed playing. She still hadn't given him a name.
You're the only one tethering me to this reality.
She stroked his head and ruffled his hair.
Outside, the sky was a dark shade of crimson, the colour of dried blood. After pollution had reached abnormal levels, the earth's

atmosphere soon gave up trying to control it. Now, for almost the whole day, the sky would stay like this. She wondered how the sky would look like having its original colour. Her father said it would look beautiful; with the clouds scattered around the enamel blue backdrop and the sun setting in the distant horizon. Right now, the sun was slowly dipping behind a wall of buildings, throwing a shadow over the woman and her child. The darkness meant the onset of danger and, tonight, she felt particularly uneasy. A few blocks away, she heard a crack of gunfire ring out. It sounded too close.

The baby was looking at his mother and extended a hand close to her cheek, where a cut shown. It was still red and there was dried blood around the sides. He pressed his hand over it. She looked at him and gave a weary smile. The child tilted his head and smiled back. Both of them had crinkles by their eyes when they smiled. The woman looked out the window and saw the last remnants of the red sky as night settled in.

Blue

Yes, blue would look beautiful.

She wrapped her arms around her son and gently rested her head on his. He still had his palm on her cheek the whole time.

I'll name you Neel.

I can't see the beautiful blue sky but I have you.

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