

Black But Beautiful

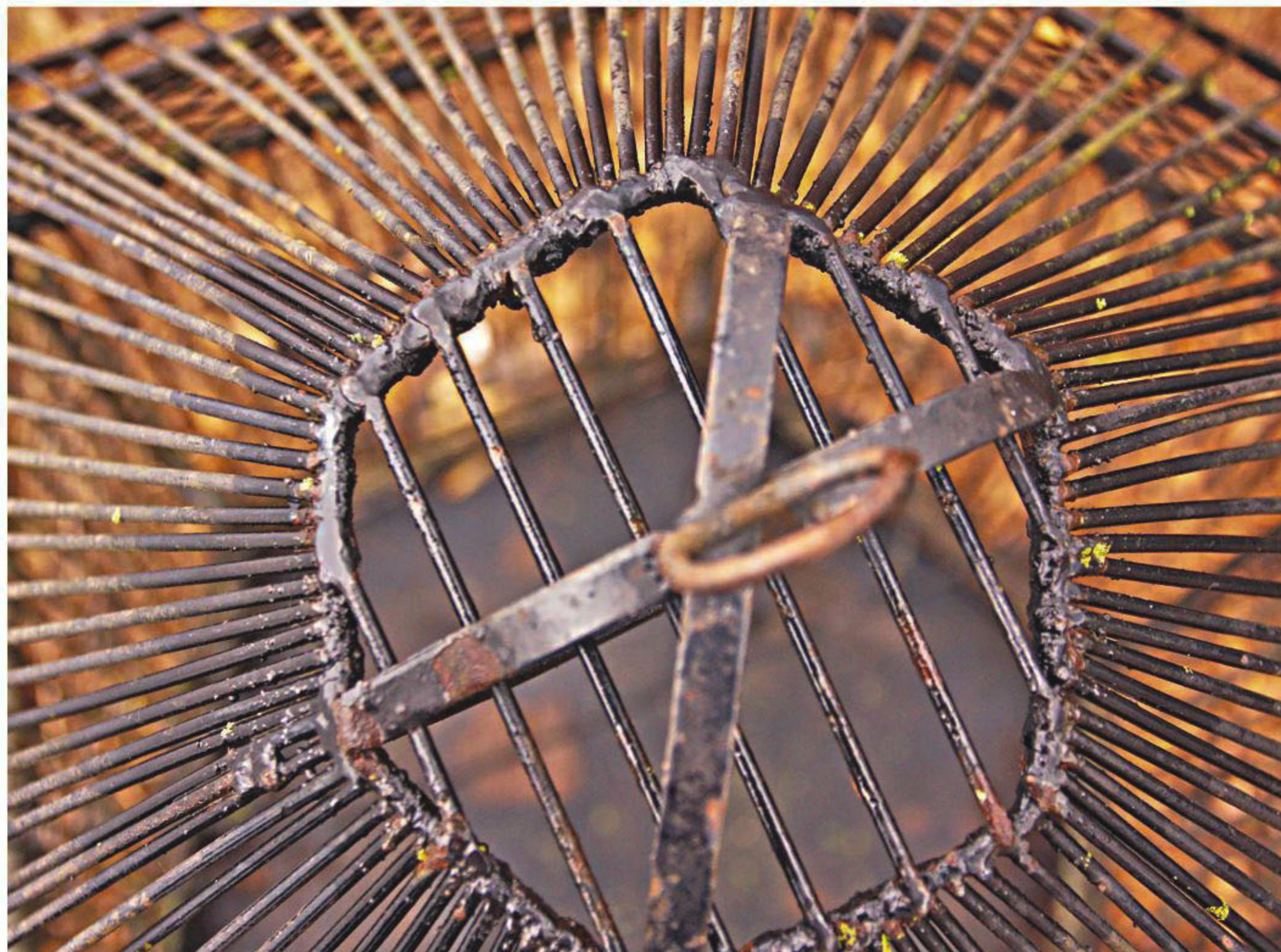
SHAIKH SABIK KAMAL

She waits in her ebony grace, ever so silently
For her patience weighs half a life of tragedy,
But she doesn't care, she keeps her gleam
On the blackest of days, on the brightest of dreams.

Her soul fathoms a maternal sadness
Of her greatest loss of her only offspring.
Yet she lives on, life is but a novel for her;
She decides her styles, her stories and her sufferings.

Her outward beauty is all but insanity,
Her soft fur and her silence a vanity,
She is a black cat in its darkest, an overfamiliarity
But she has a strength so beautiful, it surprises humanity.

Because she is black but beautiful,
Loveable but her life, painful,
And she awaits condemning her identity,
For her life is dark but graceful, sided with tranquillity.



ALIVE

NAHREEN SALEHA SHAHADAT

The guard has fallen asleep, indicating that finally my chance to escape has come. I stare intently at him to be assured with certainty that he is asleep, as there is no room for mistakes tonight.

Every night, like clockwork, he walks around this den, eyes each and every one of us before he takes a seat and rocks himself to sleep whilst exerting the most horrendous noise to ever exist. After every deep intake of air by this human I see my conspecifics shudder in fear – some in their sleep, out of habit, and some wide awake, listening to the loud, ever present poundings inside their chests, along with the guard's terrifying noises of slumber. I look around to observe the empty cages, which are not exactly empty if speaking literally, but the emptiness inside everyone make the cages seem as hollow as they are.

Once, quite a while ago, we were all free pigeons, with a soft spot for adrenaline. We used to soar through the sky and proudly showcase the lengths of our wings by outstretching them. However, and most unfortunately, the cages we are now enslaved in barely have room for us to erect a single feather. We are never let out of our cages; we haven't flapped our wings in ages. The only activity we indulge in, or are rather forced to indulge in, is eating, eating food so dry that it sucks the spirits out of us.

A sudden noise alerts me, bringing me out of my thoughts. My eyes immediately land on the guard, who thankfully is still deep in his slumber. I look up and there she is, sitting on the sill of the only window, located at the very top of the den. From far down I can clearly make out her silhouette. She is an Indian Fantail just like myself. However, unlike me, she is magnificent! She carries

a white body that seems to radiate light and a tail that stretches all the way to the horizon.

Every night she comes here and we pour into each other's eyes, both of us wishing that I was free like her. Tonight I will make our dream come true.

Today morning, very methodically and strategically, I pecked on the string tied to my left leg and set myself free. Yet I wrapped it around my leg so it wasn't visible to the naked eyes of the humans; because such an escape requires precise timing and the absence of alacrity. I was eagerly waiting for this moment.

I shake my legs and the shackle detaches itself. The sight makes her jump up and hover around the window, clearly showing her amazement. I wrap my beaks around the small handle of the gate and push. I push and push until I see an opening big enough to let me out. My heart pounds vigorously as I shoot out, only leaving a tail feather behind. I flap my rigid wings as fast as I remember how to, whilst I keep my gaze at my destiny, ignoring the sounds of shock exerted by the caged beings.

Without looking back I wrap my wings around her, making her aware of the stream of emotions I am feeling and how much I longed for this very moment.

We stare at each other unable to speak and before we even know it, we take off. We fly upwards while she circles around me with joy. We keep flying higher and higher until our lungs finally give out, and together we halt to wrap up in each other as we free fall. Right before we hit the ground we let go of each other only to catch ourselves.

Joy radiates out of every inch of my body while adrenaline pumps through my veins. Never have I ever felt this alive or in love.

We shoot back up again with both our chests almost exploding with happiness. We keep shooting up and falling down under the moonlit sky until our hearts are full of the satisfaction of being truly alive.