

## FALLING IN REVERSE

MAISHA NAZIFA KAMAL

Climbing over walls with barbed wire fences,  
Steep stairs and stained elevators,  
Holding on to the cold metal;  
Not letting go.

Walking over thorns under satin,  
Finding roads crisscrossed and broken,  
Cutting with a knife through the ocean;  
No drowning now.

Persist, you'll reach the highest high,  
Survive, the clouds there are too cotton-white,  
Don't look back, the lines have been blurred off,  
Win, no dust will dare to settle onto your armour.

But the spell breaks and the magic's gone.

No more lavender skies with flamingos flying over,  
Just pitch black void waiting to devour.  
Only treacherous swords and arrows to choose from,  
To build and break your own ice sculpture.

And you find yourself alone in a skyscraper,  
Top floor, but there's no room to take cover.  
Nowhere you can breathe without feeling the pressure.  
No hand to hold that you haven't trampled over.  
You've done everything to reach here,  
And stand atop plinths made of bones and tears,  
But all along you were just –  
Falling in reverse.

*Maisha Nazifa Kamal has lost track of time and is living in a world where she never existed. Break her reverie at 01shreshtha7@gmail.com*



## UNLUCKY IN LOVE

SHIMIN MUSHSHARAT

As I burn through my twenties at a nauseating speed, the thought that I will die alone creeps in softly, stretches, and curls into a tight ball like a sleepy kitten, and claims my heart as its permanent residence. Time passes. The kitten – that is in truth a thought – grows. Yesterweek, it was tiny, fluffy. Today it has doubled in size, the claws sharper, and now it invites a friend called loneliness.

I love love. Love as we see in the movies, love like they write in the books, love that our favourite musicians serenade on. But suffering through years of abuse in the name of love, I slowly learn that I do not know love out of fiction. I decide one day that I have had enough. I give up on love. The decision is sudden. I make it quietly. But my conviction is absolute. I remain blissfully alone for years. In these years, I make friends, learn new hobbies, and allow myself to grow. In these years, my heart remains sealed shut inside a steel cage.

One day that could be called fortunate or ominous depending on the rest of the story, love finds me again. This love looks like friendship. This love resembles a ship coming ashore with all its sails painted in the deepest of greens. I am the shore but it feels as though I am the one that's come home. I let myself bask in the warmth of a love that feels right, right, right. My hopes and dreams that were buried deep, deep inside raise their greedy heads. I fail to thwart them. They grow like ivy on a derelict

wall. They fly like kites in the spring wind. But ships tend to sail away. So does mine. I lose faith once more. And as they say, 'fool me twice, shame on me.'

I am ashamed. I do not think. I hurt and I cry and I suffocate. Worst of all, I change. This time I don't heal. This time I decide on vengeance. Only, it's my own head under the guillotine. Now I meet new people. Now I find them interesting. Now I let them charm me. Now I let them make me laugh. But all my senses are on high alert. Listening, listening, and waiting for them to tell me they love me. As pre-rain wind smells of sharp things, so does the air around people. A whiff of love and I run. And I leave. And I keep leaving.

I wake up one Wednesday morning from a deep sleep. And I realise that my heart has turned corporate. It pumps blood. And it puts time stamps on people. This human stays for three weeks. That human leaves in a month. It is extra cautious of the undeterminable people. This new and improved heart dreams of people but buries those dreams under prescription pills. It has, at last, unlearned how to love. I marvel at my own heart as if my consciousness is a balloon floating a few inches above my body. I whisper to this heart that maybe we simply ran out of luck in this life. Let us try again in the next one, yes?

*The writer is a student of computer science at North South University.*

