

ILLUSTRATION: **WARDHA MORIAM****SYEDA ERUM NOOR**

Backed into a corner,  
A house pet in the wild,  
A gift-wrapped, tamed mourner,  
With the stoned heart of a child.

Head buried in gold pages  
That promised her the sun,  
Through stone-pressed dark ages  
With time's wheels that never spun.

Walls of love and honour  
That build her grand throne hall,  
The day that God had crowned her  
Was the day that marked her fall.

The noose around her tightened,  
With the silk around her breast,  
As her honey, slick skin ripened  
To a sight, you can't attest.

Her eyes remained the same  
The hazel, golden brown  
The light in them reclaimed  
Leaving empty, wooden rounds.

The throne that tugged upon her  
Corpse-like bloody gown,  
Mourned the chains that held her  
While her body slowly drowned.

*Syeda Erum Noor is dangerously oblivious  
and has no sense of time. Send help at erum.  
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# A Soul Left Alone

**HASIB UR RASHID IFTI**

"Why don't you take another piece?" he said.

I hesitantly smiled and nodded, saying that I was full. I washed my hands in the sink, dirt from my hand spinning in the filthy sink like a whirlpool, leaving me hypnotised for a while. I went to my room, closed the door behind me and breathed a sigh of relief. I saw him again later that night around 3 AM, fleeing our home. I acted like it was nothing like I always do to anything that ever happens. For a brief 2 seconds, we stared at each other. He knew that I knew, even if on the back of my head, that he was fleeing once again. And I let it go because it didn't affect me. It'll crush his Amma whose life he ruined, it'll affect his family and the ones around him which should include me. But it wouldn't. I would let a man murder or be murdered, turn a blind eye without any hesitation, get back home, put on my headphones and cry myself to sleep.

The kid had a sharp brain. He's got a good heart. He's always so respectful to all of us. I'd hear my parents say these things. He'd vow to get sober, throw his past away and work honestly. And we'd believe him. Then one morning I would hear he broke hell, screamed at his mother like a filthy animal, broke stuff at home, took some money and left. We'd all share a brief sigh sitting on our comfortable couches and find people to blame for his downfall. "His father is to blame, letting his son wander around with the wrong kinds of people. Ah, such talent wasted!" someone would say. As tears are shed from a mother's eye back in Chittagong who trusted her blood for the millionth time and found her heart broken all the same, we sigh, blame and curse in a fake pretence that it affects us.

The son of misfortune who ruined everything, the father who was to blame, the brother who broke the family into pieces over property, the insect of a human being that is too blinded by his own ego to see through himself – they all died in the end. And the Sahibs at the capital who blamed and cursed and lied, shed their tears. I watched in silence, came back to my room and went on with my work. The grief that others

shared or at least pretended to share, I couldn't find for nights digging deeper into my hearts, desperate for a hint of sadness.

But an emptiness breathed. The idea of death, the non-existence of a person who sat beside me at our dining table and the persistent desolation – it was all there. The rest seemed like a façade; a hideous lie told for ages. My tears and my sighs seemed part of an act. While I feel like these hypocrisies and these lies are something we all share, a part of me is scared to death, fearing that it's just me. Maybe I am the only one who does not qualify as a human being but is too scared to be left alone and miserable with my true self.

So, I keep quiet and listen to a selfish old man, who never bothered to ask about his nephew when he was alive, whimpering at the sight of a lifeless corpse. I think of the mother who lost her husband and son in six months.

"Why can't he just die and let us be or kill me and leave me at peace!" she cried the morning after her son fled. With her hair all white, her skin wrinkled and her eyes hurting from all the pain,

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she sits alone in her room that once had life, reminiscing her words. The blemishes beneath her eyes swelled up with tears soaking them up, for tears are all they've ever known.

The Sahibs cried once again looking at pictures of his corpse, saying how peaceful he looked in his death. The women whimpered; the men sighed.

"Why don't you take another piece?" the voice said. I wish I'd have said yes, took another piece and sat there for a while. I wish the world cared and cried for him when he was alive. But that's too much to ask, for the dead never bothers anyone.

Their memories do.

*Remind Ifti to be quieter at  
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