



ILLUSTRATION: ABIR HOSSAIN

Sparrow Home

SYEDA ERUM NOOR

Somewhere inside the deep beyond
Sits my life-sized, pint-sized sparrow home.
There, lives my quiet, burned and scorned
And words of sanctum flow unatoned.

Amidst the turgid stumps of trees,
The path is darker farther in.
Vision swarmed with corpses that bleed
And deafened by what lives therein.

Skies darken with a holy smoke
That seeps into my nose and lungs.
My sparrow home now wears a cloak
Coaxing me close in foreign tongues.

I want to hear its muffled words
And speak to all the folk that lurk.
But sound, it leaks of screeching birds
And echoes from the nearest cirque.

So far I am, from what could be mine
Yet there it stands, a perfect crime.
Frayed are my feet, twisted, my spine.
The forest having stripped my prime.

I wear away yet still I roam,
In search of empty promises
Brewed and grown from there within
My narrow, sparrow, little home.

Syeda Erum Noor is dangerously oblivious and has no sense of time. Send help at erum.noor1998@gmail.com

A DREAM AWAY

ZAHEEN TASFIA ZUHAIR

I saw you in yet another dream.

A lanky figure in a loose black t-shirt and grey jeans – just like the first time I saw you. You walked past rows of white beds.

I dropped my gaze to the plain white tiles as your shadow fell over me. The tiles should have felt cold but it didn't. I felt nothing, other than the dream-like delight of seeing you.

"Let me tell you a story."

You sat down across from me. A familiar sensation rippled through my veins which seemed almost unrecognisable now.

As your dulcet voice wafted into the air, a story progressed. It felt like a wind chime lulling back and forth, enchanting whoever passed by.

I listened – vaguely aware that I won't remember a word.

Three kids ran towards you. The youngest sat on your lap, and smiled like she would just a few months ago.

Your story flowed but it would occasionally be uninterrupted by the other two kids resting their heads against your arms.

When you told your stories, your brown eyes would be filled with wonder. They were too lost in another world to see clearly in this one. The story unfurled, battles were lost, and the hero happened to be at the darkest phase of his life.

A voice interrupted.

"Won't you eat?"

Your gaze lifted away from mine and you'd turn towards a woman walking towards us. All five of us, who were divided in two clusters.

The hem of her lush, snowy gown brushed over the dustless white floors. Her face was beautiful. It had strong features and a soft expression which I could only describe as "motherly". Her jet-black hair cascaded down her back, embellished with tiny flowers and jewels.

You appeared to be unfazed by her beauty and familiar with her presence.

"The food is ready," the woman said.

"I'm telling Diana a story," you followed.

"Eat now, or don't eat at all."

A rigid ultimatum in such a soft voice.

You looked back at me. My head rang. The soft whispers turned to shrieks. Don't go. Don't go. Please.

But I stayed silent.

"I'll need to go now."

A blink of darkness followed, and then you were already up, with your youngest sister in your arms, and the other two kids on either side. You and the woman exchanged a glance, and a dark cloud passed over your face. You put your sister down, despite her ardent insistence which later turned into cries of protest.

The woman watched with distant coldness.

You looked back at me. I reached out for your sister, and she traipsed towards me.

"Don't bother her too much," you reminded her as she wiped tears with her fist. And suddenly I was all too aware that your other siblings had also stepped beside me.

You started to turn the other way.

"Tell me the rest of the story," I demanded.

You considered for a minute, and a smile lit up your face. A fire tickled my heart as you promised me.

Then, you and the woman turned away, walking towards a little brown door which I hadn't noticed before. The four of us, your siblings and I, watched as you walked away. The woman opened the door without even touching it.

She slipped behind it, and then, so did you.

Zaheen equates watching productivity videos to actually getting work done. Send help at [instagram.com/tasfiazuhair](https://www.instagram.com/tasfiazuhair)

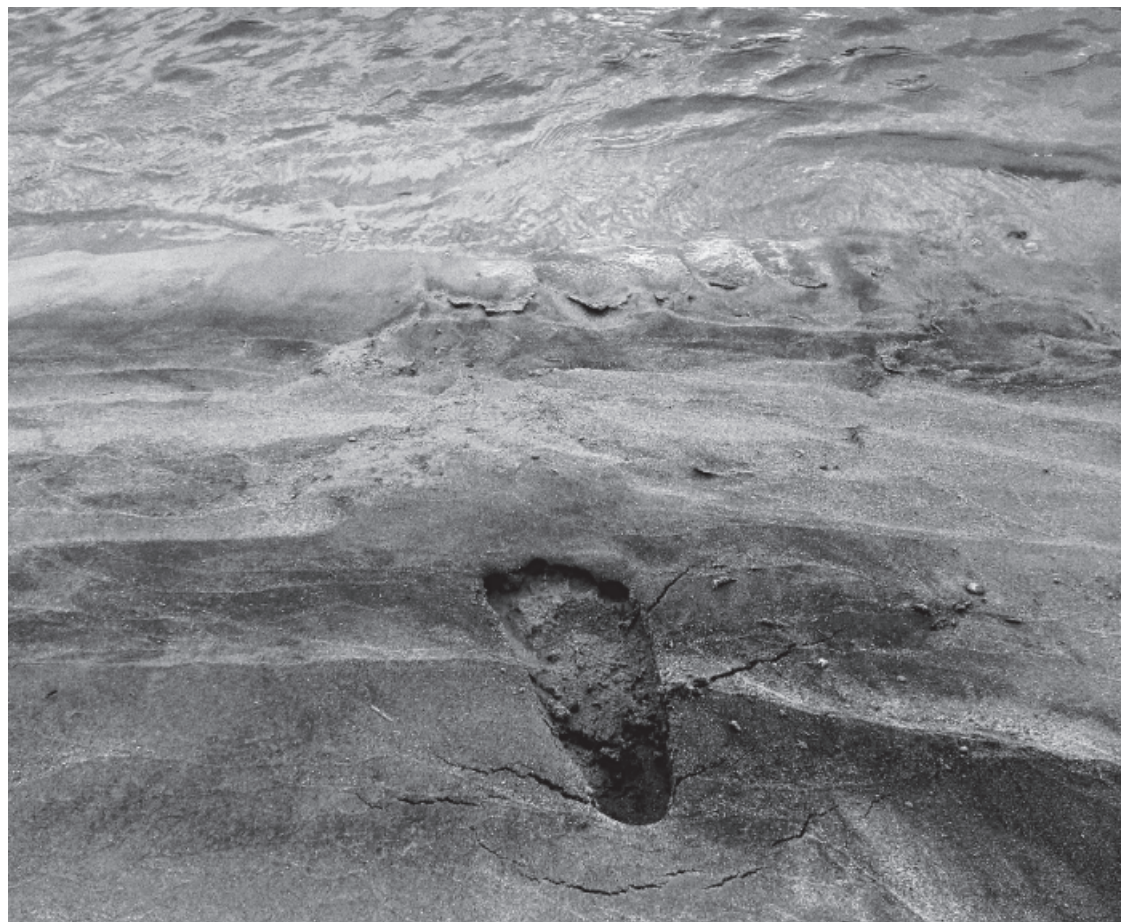


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