

UPSIDE DOWN WORLD

A.M. FAHAD

Hurt amasses under this soil like
Water under a willow tree.
Drain it all in for the rain to continue its
Cycle of ceaseless destruction.
The sun goes down every day when it's meant to be
Your legs are already five feet under
The ground
On the pavement beside the grocery store.
You wait beside the counter –
Warmth is a longing in cold milk packets,
Plastic wrappers of junk you've stored and text
Messages in brackets that remind you of love.
You will leave as happy as the day in which you came
to be
Invisible you remain, stargazer.

Fahad is fascinated by the stargazer fish's camouflage and wishes to master the art himself. Send him texts that start with "Did you know?" at amfahad1747@gmail.com



ILLUSTRATION: SYEDA AFRIN TARANNUM



ILLUSTRATION: FATIMA JAHAN ENA

Moony's Waffle Cart

NAHIAN JAMAL JOYEETA

Meesha walked past the neon pink sign of Moony's Waffle Cart, trying to fix her eyes on the ground despite the enticing aroma of freshly made waffles. The candy-cane-shaped shelf with jars of candy, sprinkles, Nutella, and every delectable waffle topping seemed to be clawing at her soul. Nostalgia set in, along with a hint of craving. This used to be her favourite stop on the way home from school. Moony had always been her go-to dessert place, no matter what time it was.

Her mouth watered at the prospect of biting into the sweet and crispy treat, but she quickly resisted the urge. She had been working hard to lose weight for the past two weeks, and succumbing to the temptation would mean that all her hard work would be for nothing. Her heart sank just thinking about it.

A familiar voice echoed behind her as she was about to leave.

"Hey, Meesha. What are you doing here?"

Meesha turned to face Arik, her partner, who constantly complained about her weight. She dreaded the idea of running into him at a spot where she could indulge in something he considered "unhealthy". She knew it would dampen her day.

"Uh, just taking a walk," Meesha said, her voice steady. She didn't want to give him any sign of her longing for the waffle.

"Are you sure? I mean," he said, pointing to the cart, "don't you want one?"

Meesha's stomach was in knots. She didn't want to talk to him about it, especially not in public.

"I'm just trying to stay on track with my diet," she explained, hoping he'd forget about it.

Arik laughed. "Okay, Meesha... don't say you're still on that diet. You look great just the way you are."

Meesha's heart dropped. She knew what was going to happen next. "But if you want to impress people, you should lose a few pounds," Arik continued. "You know, just for yourself."

"There it was," she thought.

Meesha felt a surge of rage in her chest. She had had enough of Arik's nagging obsession with her appearance.

"I'm not doing this for you or anyone else, Arik. I'm doing this for myself," she stated emphatically.

Arik raised his arms in defence. "All right, do whatever you want, but don't expect me to stick around if you can't take care of yourself," he said before taking

a step back and walking away.

Meesha watched him leave with a mix of sadness and resentment. She knew she needed to lose weight — not to impress him but to disprove him. She committed herself to only drinking water and eating a smoothie bowl once a day for the next 18 days. Her energy and motivation had begun to wane, and while she was visibly losing weight, she felt frail and hollow on the inside.

Meesha stopped in front of the mirror as she was getting ready for work, and she couldn't recognise herself with her sunken eyes and pale skin. She knew her relationship with Arik was unhealthy, and she needed to break free from his toxicity if she wanted to reclaim her bubbly self.

Meesha felt her spirits rebel and decided to treat herself to a waffle. She asked Moony for the largest waffle, oozing with chocolate and all her favourite toppings. All set, just as she was about to indulge, Moony pointed her to a sobbing teenage girl beside the counter. Meesha's heart swelled.

"Hey, are you okay?" she asked.

The girl looked up as if surprised to be noticed and said, "No, I'm not okay. I hate my body. I feel like I'm never good enough," she said, her voice trembling. Meesha knew this struggle all too well.

"I know how you feel," she said, sitting beside the girl and pausing to bite her waffle, before continuing, "I used to feel the same until five minutes ago."

"Really?" she asked. "What changed?"

"I realised today that others' expectations or my weight should never define who I am. I will fend for myself and listen to my heart. I am beautiful, even if no one sees it, and so are you," Meesha said. It felt liberating to acknowledge this out loud.

She stared at Meesha, her eyes wide with surprise. "Really?"

Meesha gave a nod. "Absolutely! I know it's not easy, but once you start focusing on your happiness, everything else falls into place."

The girl wiped her tears and smiled. "I appreciate it. I'm Gina, by the way, you are?"

Meesha felt ecstatic, "I'm Meesha. Want to split this waffle with me?"

Gina's face lit up. Meesha handed her a fork. A beautiful sunset was seen as they sat there munching. Relief and joy washed over Meesha. She pulled out her phone and texted Arik to meet her after work.

Spill the tea with Joyeeta at [Instagram.com/smolbabyjo](https://www.instagram.com/smolbabyjo)