EBONY CIGARETTES

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PART ONE

I.I

IVORY

Winter's not early.
But it's a cold afternoon. Shivering human crowd.
In and out in a hurry in this smoking October, fog thin like cigarette fumes.
The sun is hidden behind the clouds: puffed cheeks, black blush.

Wandering here and there, arms crossed— dragging formals in the dim luminance as it persists.
Fancy thin clothes– scuffling red ears.

Flocks in the antisocial yard, wrinkly tongues behind the back tryna' predict when it'll muzzle.
‘Yes..it’ll rain soon...God, maybe in next vicious minutes,’ replies another old voice.
The clouds don't seem like they'll shed.

Yellowness outside Lasker mansion, like a wheat field blowing its crumbs, dry golden leaves, and dust. So tiny, whether dream or real.
Itching the nose walls: index pins the right nostril, flies out smoke and the clugging spew.
Lips firmly on the cigarette.

Soothing the throat, lukewarm: the exhaling smoke, mixing in the dim day.
Thin and clean the bud, no yellow accumulation, fancy tobacco, calm on the nose. Mamu perfected Papa’s creation.
Ash dripping– flying away in the wind.

Burning in sport the Ebony stick, cheeks sink, puff pours down the lungs.

Wailing, several thousand mosquitos, buzzing– hitting the back– to join more women-whispers, things with legs running past to the hall.

Fingers stretch out like scissors: cigarette falls further a step– half consumed, pinky-sized, red and yellow sparks blurry like traffic lights.

Stomp!
Crushing beneath the boot.
Strides towards the yard gate: a small nailless claw, anchoring small hands– soft as Nancy's paw. ‘Aunn!’
‘Shooo Neymat.’
Carrying a wide grin on her face.
‘Why everyone tears..ing??’ ‘Where..Aariz Mamu??’
Innocent voice among this rehearsed opera, honey.

‘Eat your mother's brain, Neymat.'
Clinging onto the white jeans, the grin stretches into a smile, her eyes climbing. ‘Ivoryyy.’ Licking her lips. ‘Ivoruuyy.’
Flarin' tiny fingers up tryna’ reach the hair.
Wide baby pupils.
‘Go inside…then..’ Calloused palms slide back, collecting the ivory strands, folding into a circle, second and third and a knot. ‘…Later I’ll let you play with my hair.’
‘Ivoryy now!’
..Ugh…. Wishes sticky as honey.
A soft ting, silver beads smacking into each other, her payal– muting at the right shoulder.
Crashes like a Ferrari: arms clutch around the neck, tears in her eyes– sinkin’ head onto the chest. ‘Don't tell me to get off right now.’ Sniffles. Sniffles.
Wet sniffles.
In the same pink shirt and white skirt, hasn't bathed for two days.
‘I can smell it in the air.’ Gasps. ‘It's reminding me of Papa.' Tightening her arms.

Water flowing in the corners, sight growing blurrier, warmer.
Unable to wipe holding her back.
They squint– warming her face, wet.
Grains, salt around her under eyes– two shades dusky…..three.
‘Sauhana– Don't cry, Bebo.’

Swift air, like 2012's rapidos.

Hair latches 'front, covering her eyes.
Perfect coffee shades the strands as mom's tea. 'Bun??'
'Yes...please.'

All dry and frenzied, in two thick strands, a circle and another– cute little bun.
Neymat climbs in her lap– loud sniffs, snorting back tears– going back.

Weight on the Yellowstone, long-beaked flock, clay faces entering from the wide-open main gate.
Exhales– leakin' last threads of ivory smoke– nose all clean–

Clogging, moving past the flock in slow steps, cheap perfume, unearthly vomit-causing notes.
Lengthy steps, jumps from the marble pavement, marching to the exit.
'Buy some mints! Ammi doesn't like that smell.' Bebo's soft voice– careless, yelling. 'Ispara! Don't venture too far.'

Cold the metal yard gate, soil sinking beneath the feet– Ivory swings it back, big leap– Thud! It hits its gravel bounds.
Shuts behind the scampering steps.

SAUHANA LASKER

Piercing noise, murmurs: discourteous wide shutting shoulders, women moaning in their speeches.
Tiny rare glimpses of space on the floor. Warm white floor, filled with brown shoes, blue and golden sandals.
‘Excuse me, please.’ Same words on repeat.

Crawling kids in between the tall unparenting legs.
‘Fuck off, ginger.’ The boy snoops behind his mother's skirt.

A lengthy turn and another, Neymat not making any noise.

‘Eesssh!’ Sharp! Elbow, collides! On the skull.
Arms rigid against Neymat’s back, climber's grab. ‘ALlahhh’
Neymat’s cries, buzzing bumbblebee.
‘Allahh! Are you blind!’ utters Nehruma Lasker.
Gasps the grungling guests.
‘Badi Ammi…. you're….esssh’
Someone gives her a hand. ‘She was with you? Rano is breaking her limps in attempts to find her…’
Grabbing her, lap left empty, Nehruma moving in haste.
Crying exceptionally in her bony hands. ‘SUSHHH CHILD.’ Nehruma yells.
Distortion crawling mapping new depths in the ear canal like an unannounced electricity cut. Finger pin in the ear shaking vigorously. Vibrations,
vibrations.
‘Get up, young lady.’ Rando moustache.
‘Get away!’ Jolts up, palms pushing on the knees. ‘Badi Ammi! Have you seen Sahina Baji!!?’
‘No… let me know! Of her!’ Only voice, a ghost in the crowd like others.

Ahh Migraine in the skull bone. ‘…..Bony old crude.’

Crowd entering, blocking light– rubbing the head, trails to the right spacey corner of the main hall.

Dark like an eclipse: covering windows, silhouettes, tapping shoes and moustaches underneath shadows; tipping rays like wormholes the roof windows.

OBSIDIAN

Sahina Lasker sitting on his wooden chair near his desk.
Yellow sky.

Cold skin behind the thin layer of rosy-white dupatta– cotton pinks running against the winds: he loved these rapid winds.

Escaping short, muted breaths.
Bleachy bedsheet: his dandruff oil. Dust on the loved books.

Fingers shaking on the knees.
At some edge, his pillow alive with the smell of his hair.
Snorting, slashing through the curtains, neck further out the window– branches rumbling, leaves falling–
Spits out.

Throat desert, tipping frost on the fingers, steel bottle ice-cold, chugging it whole at once.
Cold poking,
tracing on the stomach wall.
Thud!
Screams the wood, dust hovering off the desk; soaking tipping drops.

Flying obsidian hair mirroring the billowing black curtains:
drenched in the motion of the clouds, burnt cotton candy.
Breathless corners– one stretches further– a flat silk tip hits the eyewhite– burns, fingers pushing in the socket, rubbing.
Salt.
Snatching the bottle, trips a couple of drops, bouncing off the reddened eye–
tipping frost hits the right place.
Hush
Chest, floating out. *Hush*

Lips pout, another spew out– curtains hurl back– ending the epileptic luminous.
UGh

Squeaks the chair, soft its cushion against the back– sight anchors on the wall before his desk.
Scattered collage, the sketches rustling, poorly taped.
The pile of the books, loved hardcover submerged in a thin layer of dust.
Orange-green cover, middle-aged lady in a plain long skirt smiling, wide smile.
Eyes scatter, hands turn sideways, thumbs on the armrest.

Glued glass vase, home to his frenzy brushes: expensive brushes couldn't last in his hands, hard oils and hands that were always in hurry.

Faint stench of time– tongue pressing hard against the teeth.
Belly groans as the chair scoots further to the window, freezing concrete.
Ugh
Stumbles a breath.
The room–

Palm caging the nose. All those oils mixed to make the paintings.
Spitting out.
Duppata wraps around the neck, arms into a hug.

UGHH
Retches! Breathes, muddling at the throat wall.
Gasps!
Palms pushing in the belly.
Thin liquids rain below–
Ugh....
Sour as stale lemon the stomach acid.

Vomit odour screamed in the air, mixing with the howling window, parodying gags.
Bones shrink off the chair like a cat– piercing the jute of the rug.
His blood! Foam of shaving cream.
Near, underneath the bed.
Fresh smell of new soles. His blood onto something steel-ish.
'UGHH!' Flooding out gut-water.

Thirsty rug swallowed each drop and smell thread in an instance.

Sleeves soaking it off the lips– bits of dust behind

To the desk, somewhere at the right, near books, rug's gallop in the shadow, hand hovering for the bottle– cold steel– too light for a bottle, empty.
Thud! Hits metal window frame– to the sky or trips– three floors down into the forest.

Soft knocks, barely alive on the face of the redwood door.
Getting louder.
Knock, Knock, Knock.

'Baji! It's me....'

Down like a body trace suspended on the floor, toes compressed against the desk wood, elbows licking rug's dust, fingers far, holding onto the fresh Nike box.

Boxes tilted sideways, fallen out three and a half razor blades.
On one red stains, his blood–
'BAJIII...'
Nails catching the steel edges, collecting in the palm, straight and unshaken– off the window, in the air.
Kick on the Nikes, and on its cardboard boxes, slip under the bed.
Getting softer her knocks.
Big inhale.

Knock. Knock. Knock.

Thud! Hits the metal handle to the left, a slit on the door.
Peeking through, her eyes, slithers in.
‘Ufff…how-’ utters Sauhana in her high tones.
‘Don't start.’

SAUHANA LASKER

As pale as her white suit, low eyelids— growling belly.
Blade marks: his carved name, a “P” and a heart; her eyes though away from the desk edge.
The glass vase screeches on the desk, slightly tipping off the denim skirt; mass flattening on the comfort of the oak desk, spring days were filled with book-reading sessions at the same space.
Yuck
Bodily fluids, his oil and fresh vomit. ‘How are you SURVIVING….here?

Chest inflating cautiously– so is hers, incredibly still in his chair.
Once hit his forehead on the headrest, frustration with colours, “Sky always pretty when it's pink.”

Nostril flaring, her palm covering the nose– breathing silence of this room. Shaking fingers like last year, pinching them together– staring at the sky.

It's sickening: it's ugly, it has layers, it's oily, breathing, and it's yellow.

The window seems small; does metal shrink in cold?
Stiffen her shoulder as if all bones– *Athu* Almost came back the spit.
In such devastation the plants and greens, or joy, vibrating.

Dupatta as long as her hair– light the pale pinks.
Her hair, billowing, always in a different mood.
‘Ispara’s smoking again.’ Lips bite themselves. ‘Can we do something… about that?’
‘Don’t bother.'
‘As she said, two days ago.’
‘Often does.’
Her arms gripping herself, grinding over dry skin.

Grey patches on the white sleeves– the vomit. In a self-hug.

His brushes, loved even the witch hair ones– ‘How are you surviving here... again?’
‘I said, "Don't start."
‘Baji...’

Nostrils folding into themselves, can't, no more– arm runs down the bent knees, rummaging in the second top drawer.
Stationary and his stuff– spiky pencils, heads of fountain pens – juggling fingers here and there– a familiar shape! Large capsule like jar, his Vics.

Big drops at the gates of the nostrils.*Ahhs....* Finally, a normal breath.
‘Hmm..?’ In the palm.
Sahina throws it back and shuts the drawer.

‘Even the balm’s drenched in his smell.. Of course. Touching, day and night, remember his daily cold? Such weak lungs... Weakest! Of us all! Unwashed fingers, contaminating everything....that day he made me wash my hair thrice..do you remember? Gum, glue and all..’

Neck turning to the middle, too long at the tilt–
his bed, giant wall–
colossal, his portrait.
‘Yet much more forgiving compared to that atrocious hairfall oil, Allah burn rosemary...’
Deep inhale, breaths drenched in mint & menthol.

Her ears are in the space as her sight, unblinking ochre eyes.
‘We can't deal with this, Baji. We can't make peace....’
‘I said don't start!!...’
'Just...' Neck slips into a nod. ‘Ufhmm.’

Eyes ocean, reeking of salt– but won't let it flow– stubborn!

The darkness, the stillness, the corner which once held his soul.
‘Such a smile.. you were right...’ Droplets down the cheeks.

‘You know, whenever you call them unique, his eyes..barely visible in this, he liked it this way…doesn't he?' A chuckle leaks as a gasp– droplets off the chin.
‘He had such long hair…I envied them! I envied his height…his smile.
How bad of me!! Evil! I'm… Do you think I put Nazar on his hair?.. Yes! Otherwise how!?’
Landing the nails on Sahina’s shoulder. ‘Baji, how are you NOT bothered by this smell!? Of his oil!’ Spits deep down the window.

'It's so dark…’ Wiping the nose, wet palm. ‘He sure loved that colour. Black shirt, black hair, black eyes..I loved them, unique. Yours and mine are same….I adored hisss!….Eyes.’
‘SAUHANA!! STOP!' Slams the fists on the armrest. Tremble the brushes. ‘Just…’
‘I! Bet… If I were dead instead of him, he would've been downstairs! Mourning! Looking after what I left!…….We aren't looking… What are we doing, Baji? Snatching fingers off her palm. ‘We can't hide.’

Back turns to her– severe darkness at the door.

Up and down rattling the latch, squeaking at the same mark.
‘Ughhh…stupid handle.’
Slap, bounce the fingers, her hand– a fierce pull– hits the handle to its bound.
‘Wipe your face.' Carrying salt, her voice.
Lips stretch slightly, following her out; noisy corridor.

Barely familiar relatives, crossing– opening doors of the guestrooms.
‘Sauhana, lock the door, please.’
‘Ammi has one spare key, wait.' To the mom’s room.

Shiny silver key– a twist and pull back– locks Aariz's room.

ISPARA LASKER

I.II

Mild pear– the ivory smoke. Or brain making shit up.
Melting the clouds.

Ebony cigarette pressing against the lips.
Spacey E-4 curb, surrounded by construction wreck, Pallavi's shop.
'Sorry, Isapra, no mints.' Shining white shirt, Mom would like. 'I told Papa.. ...maybe soon he'll buy it.'
The smoke trailing up tangles in the eye nerves, salt– sitting on the eyeline.
Sniffle.
Tapping matchbox on the candy jar. Pallavi's bore, chin resting in a handstand. 'You're doing o-'
'Really nothing??....' Throws the match back on the counter.
'Hmm,' Pallavi sighs, grabbing the matches mid-air.
'What about mint-flavour candies?'
'Nope...'
'Mint cigs?'
'Yea...we have those..'
'Ofcourse..you have that shit.'
Bhahaha

Eyes on the boy in that photoframe.
'Hello!? Why, you staring at that donkey?' Snaps her fingers.
Eyes curl deeper, familiar looking. 'Whyyy.. Your brother looks like her in that photo?'
'Who??'
End wall of the shed, the small wooden frame, family photo.
'Nevermind.'
No dust on the boots. Dry the soil, exhausted grass. Frogs croaking beneath the wreck behind the shop.
'Tell me... who.'

‘Nonee.’
‘Oh…really??’ Bending her whole back. ‘Hm…I don't see..wait…I see it…no fucking way…. Fuck… my brother looks like your ex….. that's hilarious.’ Chuckles.
‘Ugh…it is’
‘Soooo….’ Eyes lighting up. ‘Should I arrange a date?’

‘Fuck you….’
Hands off the candy jars– stepping away.
‘Hey, Ispara!’

Steps pause.
That concerned head tilt. ‘Heard about your brother… you can stay here for a while, you know.’
Still dustless, silver spikes.
A swift clean nod. ‘Am ok, Lav, thanks tho.’ Jumps off the stony platform.

The afternoon is setting, or already set, dull blurry ochres.

All the small-to-big shops and stalls have this temporary metal tin up and in front. Monsoon passed but you can't trust the rain.
Cough
Cough
‘UMMMGHH!’ Spits on the grass on the left.
All the greens on the narrow pavement aroused like flowers.
Sparrows chirping high-pitched notes, away past the shoulders.

Things are a blur; the crub is just a giant curl, the concrete bricks have no details, except the ones beneath the boots.
No details, buildings, greens or anything far.

Especially leaves on that tree, closer by each step.

The leaves have a bubbly shape, gaps and gaps, and they are green, but– it's not the same. Low pixels.

Water slippin' through the corners of the eyes.
Blur– though not blind.
But the leaves are pixelated.
Sniffles– People passing by, many people.
They are staring.
Wiping the eyes with the side of the fists– drenching wet– starts to slip.

Pacing up, steps jumpy like sneezes– one at a time.

Turns after turns, black and white roads.
Big curbs and small streets.

Rubbing them dry on the black denim loosens the bandage, budging off the knuckles, residue chewy on the skin.

Mixing with sweat, tickling soggy air.
Edge of A-1, home street.
Fists slip in the jacket. Crawlin' off the bandage.

More cars parked, more turd-y intruders roaming around.
One's on the yard gate, clinging like a child, swinging, up and down the butt–
'Hmm-HMM!' With the mouth covered.
It jolts like a fish, jumping off the gate.
Colder the yard gate– wide open.

Remains the yard, a few staircases to swipe above the two floors.

Kids smacking chairs.
Bade Papa Salim Lasker is yelling at those little shits. 'DOG BREEDS!'

Wet as fuck the nose.
‘Ispara!...’
Salman’s voice.
Empty chairs– not along Bade Papa–
Eyes squint-
‘Here. ’ Hands up, at the backyard entrance.
‘Wait a minute.' Salman Lasker pulls the phone away from his face.
‘Have you seen Farook Chacha??’
‘No.’ Slow nods.
‘Huh!?’ Grunge eyebrows.
‘Hm... NO, Bhai.'

Nodding– Damn, a whiff, explosion of spice.
Cough *Cough*
Turns to the fat man in an apron at his side.

Uhh
Feet turn to the main entrance.

Echoing footsteps too high, like the far-away train.
Scattered footwear, countless pairs, dense.
Najiya Lasker’s side of the stairs– fuck the livin' room. Skipping on the stairs. Hymns and noise.

No names. No sounds fall at the back of the ears.

Hushhhh Stomach stretching back– third floor.

Her door shut– some expensive white wood she likes now.

His door too– shut. Fuck no, no knocks.

The sky's on his asthma meds. Breathing steadily, the clouds going all black.
Click Shifts the door in.
'Meow!'
'Nancyy missed me?' Grey and white tiger scales.
Nancy, that gleeful smile, sitting on the bed. Whiskers bending– open window.
'Mississssssss mis mis mis me?'
'Meow.' The tiny spikes of her tongue cleaning the fingertip.
Warm grey fur.

CIRCUS-ISH TENT/ ARBAZ KHAN

I.III

Found his Mamu after hundreds of steps, now in his space.
Sitting together on a big gravel.
A lit small white cigarette in Arbaz's left hand.
Twenty cigarettes between them since.
'None as good as you make Mamu..' Inhales Arbaz Khan, black smoke of a street cigarette.

Sight scattering like a dragonfly– at his face later, where he's facing.
Farook staring at the sky.
Or at the tent-like heights of the shop across this road– has many flavours of cigs and drug substitute meds.

'Weighted shoulders, grey hair, dusky eyes... Mamu doesn't deserve this!
FAROOK LASKER WAS A TITLE. On everything good. Feels just moments ago he was around Zeeshan's age, rich kid with filthy big ideas...all now grey and black. God's cruel. Mixing him, kicking the family.
Poor kid wasn't even 20!... Mamu loved him way too much; now settled on this damn rock, mute!' Arbaz punches the gravel.
'We shouldn't have left Lucknow. We had billions!! And billions more! Can have....'
Farook still has the burning shit in his hand. Tastes like shit–
Throwing his at the side.
Annoying winds!
'All of this so familiar..funeral of Gauri Bua, Farook was crawling on the ground. Inna na illahi...She was a loving aunt. Life hits you in the face when it kills people of your age; not so safe with all this blood and bones.' Cheeks sucking, almost the same, this orange cigarette.
'Huhhh...how do people stop loving someone? He still misses his sister, I can tell– it's on his face. Gauri, Sohail, Aariz, all... They collide as one

all… together; lose, lose, lose.. you simply can't love enough. It doesn't exist, if love was true to its words it would preserve, my wife would fast for me,
look, cook for me. No, everyone wanna sell salt and lick green notes…huhhhhh, that's life, though; all one can have is nicotine.
Jannat, Jannat, to all, to all I knew.
To her.
I told you you'd die in the washerman's arms; his dick would hit too hard. Life's not easy. Wish we could marry… maybe in next life. I may be old and ugly, but we would be happy.. kids and daughters in a swimming pool. Fuck. Go crawl wherever death shoves and crumbles the thick gravel sheets… bones and all.'

Straighten the tent top, edging wind, shit's like a circus.
'How the fuck is it straight?? Bamboo sticks? Can't be just ropes; ropes are unreliable. These aren't even ropes, they tied together curtains.'
Phones buzzing in the pocket. The latest screen phone.
'Such innocence was in his smile.
Just can't imagine– Zeeshan is young. How old is he? A teen, often hiding, masturbating all the time.. My dad whooped my ass for that. I should do the same. But, yet, can't imagine losing him. How one must survive losing a son? What should I say to Farook?….. Tough having memories and familiarity. Scary to have a family; one day, sooner or later, you'll lose. Better to die in a forest, before death hits your face with a hammer.'

'Something new..' Farook throws the virgin cigarette– eyes at the ground, a pigeon nibbling on its dying spark– sticks to its claw as it flies away.
'Which kind?' Arbaz jumps off the rock.
'Strong.'

ZAREENA LASKER

Sizzling oil, big pots– buzzing wings of hummingbirds filling the ear.

‘Have you found him?'
‘No. Nobody knows, and he's not picking up,’ replies Salman.
HuH Almost evening. ‘Kabooli ready?’
'Soon.' Tapping on his screen phone.
‘Good.’ Cloves, rich black peppers, bay leaves. ‘And Biryani?’
‘Biryani?’ Eyebrows pause in the air.
‘Yes… kabooli is only necessary for Farook and Tehreem. The suits should have something with more fat and fuck off as soon as possible.'
‘Biryani??’
‘Just for four hundred won't be enough. More people are to come, news would only spread further.’ Taps, big strong shoulders. ‘And where something warm.. would you?’

Even snooping around the garden, fucking nameless moles.
‘And try Arbaz’s cell! He's probably with Farook. Let me know if anything.'
Honk, that chime, her car.
Steps haste to the yard.

‘Oh, Ameena…’ Crawling Ameena through the limestone.

‘Aapa…’ Filling the arms. ‘Oh, my, the kid. Howww, Allahh…how???’
Smelling exactly how she does, earthy.
‘Oh, my sweet sister, where do I beginnn??’
All grey her hair now, left diamond dyes. ‘It's not the place to talk…go, rest. It's good you came…'
Shaken pats on the back. ‘I wanted to see him! Why didn't you inform??
Me…. sooner? I’m his aunt…Zareena. I'm…why didn't you?’

‘Ohh…’ Metal chain her grip. ‘I got here just hours before you… they, hm… made peace with our nephew yesterday, without us, without informing us.’
'Ahhhh… Shame on Farook! I'll slap his face!’
‘Please do.’

SALMAN LASKER

Itching, wiping his forehead with the same apron– goddamn filthy.
'Oi!'
Arms hanging left and right, pouting fat belly. ‘What up, Boss?’
‘See… I need biryani for like… Hundreds of people..’ More honks, puzzling for parking, clouds sitting right above the noisy car, some white beards stepping off.
‘Boss??’
‘Ywweah.. Biryani for five hundred people. A.S.A.P. Can you make it?
Eyes squinting downwards with his smile. 'I know you can!'
‘This isn't what we talked man. More work at the end of the hours!? We had a deal, two dekchis of Kabooli.’
A slow breath, claw on his bald spot, back of the head. ‘Money. As much as you'll ask. Bounces the taps, fatty shoulders. ‘But! I want good food and as much as I ask for. Right now!’
‘Hm, hm… Sure… Why don't you say that first?.. Sure.’ Going back– stirring Kabooli.
Rich cloves smearing in oil.

‘But, Boss…' Sweaty smile, stretched neck. ‘…You have to bring the ingredients…’ Fat pinches of dry spices into the Kabooli.
'Hm…'

A swipe, scrolling unsaved numbers.

‘Hello, Riyaz..YEH…yeah..I need you to go to the market. We need spices, rice….and hmm, bring everything uses in… Biryani…’ Cell persists against the ear. ‘And we need the ingredients today. TODAY.’

ZAREENA LASKER

Toes slip out of the cotton slippers. Door step of the living room.
Sobs, murmurs in the moisture, air sticky, the living room, a queen's chamber in a hive.
Duppatas on trail wiping tears– cousin's hymns, aunt's requiem, mother's screams.
There's Tehreem.

Stains and stains on the beautiful Saniya's grey rug.
'Be gone!' Steps rushes to the very corner.
'Oh, Tehreem…' This Woman onto rupture her lungs, tears, throat, everything holding her voice. Floods and floods out of these tiny jewels of the eyes. 'Side! Be gone.'
'Shh, sweetheart, don't cry this muchhh….'
Arms bending further; her folded back. Hiccups and endless sniffles– racing heartbeat echoing through the spine.
'Oh…don't…don't…, Beta don't… Sushh…. Each tear is torture to your son's soul.. sush.. don't.'
Sniffles only sniffles.

Ladies repeating the words— the consoles— the comforts— the Qur'an, but Tehreem's eyes– drowning.
Rice fields.
Jolts the fingers aside, sinks her head back down to her knees.
'Don't cry, child. You'll reunite!! Reunite with your son in Jannat! Certainly. Inshallah.' Stiffen her shoulders like gravel. 'You'll be able to say your salam and goodbyes.'
'Baji, should we start the dinner?? Here in the living room?' Asks Iram Lasker, the uplifted voice.
Tired, even the hair is dry. 'Tehreem…my child…'
'Bajii??? Should we begin…with…?'

"Yeah! Go and serve! And please find out of Farook… try to feed the couple first.'
'Yes….right away.

I.IV

BULBS

Yellow light bulbs, moths drenched in warm colours, their small black eyes going through the light. Hitting their heads on the hot glass, heat and exhaustion on the tips of the flared wings.

Big dekchis, thick metal lids, a slit on one– a thin trail of vapour, star anise climbing staircase to the sky.
On whispers the smearing red ruby coals.

A few dozen moths around the dekchis, on the ground, motionless, wingless.

One falling down, black eyes hit the dying coal: ivory ash hits the eyes, texture as if spice underneath smearing red the coal, spiky legs slowly twitching, fluffy belly bursts, a few drops of green blood– leaking out – fine white turning into ash, melting wings.

Two handfuls of space between bulbs and the dekchis, closed. Winglife uninvited for the food.

On the flavour-leaking lid– an old hat and a gold-coloured watch.
Cook sitting on a chair nearby.
Air passing through the million hole, on lifeline the sando– shirt not so light, some synthetic fabric, wiping temple's sweat– drops runnin' down the neck folds and chest hair. His sweat reprise as the eyes catch the wide shoulders emerging from the dark. Salman Lasker’s shadow.

SALMAN LASKER

Exquisite– star anise in the air. Fading smoke of the coals– something cottonish too, carrying the smoke, similar to wool.
‘Everything’s done…’
‘Yea…good job.’
‘Now…let me be freee.’
Fingers slip on the dark leather wallet.

‘Woah..’ Caught it like a cat. 'Huahh… you don't wanna take some stuff from thiss??..’
‘I only carry cash. Now shoo…’
Snatches onto the lid, tosses the cap, loose on the head, watch swings on the wrist, adjusting all with skipping steps. ‘Call me whenever you need cookinggg…..’

A long breath. All the same, the garden’s plants breathing in the dark. Cold stone boundary. Bends the spine, dust on the boots.
Strong mustard yellow, moths in its persuit– hitting transparent glass– red & white, so strong the tiny wings.

‘Nothing on Farook and Arbaz?' Zareena Bua, *Hush* long breath as she sits beside. Sometimes doesn't mind the soil.
‘Arbaz said, “We’ll be there in ten mins."

‘Allah…….’ Her operic relief-breath.
‘The cook added too much spice, he didn't like spice that much…. begging me to cook instant noodles with eggs but always, always, throwing all the peppers.’ Haha. ‘Even if they were bell peppers.’
‘Aohh.. that gym meal of yours?’
‘Yes.. he was the only one… who liked it.’

‘You yourself???’

‘Nah..it tastes horrible.. but it was quick and good enough somehow.. I don't know.’
Hand younger but warmer than mother’s. Or colder the back.
‘He was adorable, stretching his cheeks since.. Perhaps we both made him look fat, food and stretch?’
‘Hm…I never..showed him love…'
‘But you cooked for him.’ Tickling the scalp, Bua's sharp nails.
‘That counts?’
‘Of course.’ Nails at the hair roots. ‘Awfully dry head you got…’
‘Hmmm…’

Crickets chirping night songs, winds resting in the air.
‘Of course, it counts, dear.’

‘Where’s your father?’
Tiny green bug climbing the boot. ‘No clue.’

CAR/ SALIM LASKER

The road appears empty, fog, much fog.
Shakil’s driving slow.
Animal-prone road.

Diesel car, humming like a morning bird. Freshly serviced, it appears.

The quota of talks tipping off drops, all filled to the brim: funeral chats, life, death, and personal symphonies; quotes that help to get rid of the pillow in the morning, nihilism is devil's masturbation, love for Allah and his plan, faith is fate N all that.

Rotating the small version of the old well-type handle, thick window glass taking all its time, shameless the cold wind.
Teeth open like a dam, spitting out tobacco’s residue. Orange filth, the drops cling to the lips, like chewing flavourless wood, though kills nose’s scrutiny and lasting cold mint on the tongue.

Back of the palm flares away from the lips. ‘Such fucking tragedy…..’
Hushh ‘Never a good father I was, yet..can't imagine losing any of my kids.’ Spits out.
Riyaz’s sigh.

Clouds, for good, hid the smug orange ball.
‘Can’t even comprehend what Chacha is going through.’ Niyaz's turning the wheel. Few more turns.
Nehal's chewing gum.

‘He has always been all loving…no wonder been missing, great God, things and home don't remain the same.’ Tobacco grinding against the molars.

‘He’s devastated,’ scoffs Riyaz.

‘Who wouldn't be?’ says Nehal. ‘Nineteen years of care and love and..all..
Going away in a blink... Two days ago he was pranking me....’
Ugh... All exhales.

Circles, circles, circles, on the handle, glass properly down to the trench– filling the neck folds, chilling the metal– a mouthful of orange gunk. Fog scattering like a doll's hair.
Eyes squint– ‘Is that Farook?.....Who's that other guy???’
Car's slowing. ‘Yeahh. It's Chacha.’
‘And that's Dad!' Zeeshan points out.
Horn honking.
Arbaz looks back– clueless lemur.
Farook– same black kurta, dust clinging to his back– eyes looking sunk-y.
Smoke, smoke, smoke, the cheap kind.
Short sniff.
‘What were you doing??' Eyes turn sideways, lips closed. ‘Huhh??’
‘Legs...somethin.. like walking....’ *Ugh*
Kunkles pushes the door shut. ‘Go on..’

Leaning forward, sinking mass– few pats on Farook's shoulder.
Pins the patting palm, his cold fingers, straighten his mouth.
‘Stay strong.’

‘He is being strong, Father...' utters Riyaz.
‘I know, Son. But, needless, keep...having the strength, Farook.’

ZAREENA LASKER

Finally..there he is!!' Sauhana sprinting out.'You made us all so worried!!' Arm swinging, hitting his back.

Farook hugs back, holding her hand.

Head down– chairful of murmurs, eyes aimed at his back.

'Where have you been!?'
'Don't as–'
A big tight hug. So light his back. Cracked like a cookie.

Firm grip on his arm– the crowd splits in half– feet pause at once, huffing at the kitchen gate.

Two kids in the kitchen, mouths covered with rice. Eating from one big plate, sticking grains to fingers and floor.
'Go out! Eat with your mothers!'

Palms on the white marble. *Crack* Elbows cracked, Farook sat on the counter.

Grains and grains.

Messed to the tiles– one by one, in the palm.

Inaudible his breath, just as the steps.

'Go on..wash your hands.' Isn't smelling like his wife, drenched in vile smoke.

Sitting still, back pushed like oldman. Ain't swinging his legs.

Tab turns and pours freezing drops– grains down the sink.

‘Show me.’ Look fair, good. Although, dirt underneath the nails.
That darting tobacco smeared on the finger tips.

Squashy the fingers, tipping black drops.
‘Dry them now.’

Pin at the sink-tab, half open, eyes night– and lips sleeping.

Gauri's knitted floral carpet on the wiped titles.
‘Come on down, Farook.’

A small plate of kabooli, long strands, brown rice– instead of white.
Funeral food isn't made of fine rice. Glutton cook.

Places ‘front his eyes in the same line, sight scattering while stomach talking to spine, all air that stomach bulge.

Cloves, half-buried black peppers in high quantity. Plate’s silver sheen in his eyes. ‘I'm not hungry.’

‘Ohh, don't prolong this misery on yourself, Brother. Eat.’

‘She ate?' Silvers slip off from his ovals.
‘Yes.’
Screeches his forehead, tongue peeking through–
‘Allah.. I can't even..begin to… how, can't lie like you… No, my dear. No. She hasn't eaten.'

Scratching forehead. ‘Hmm.’

A small bite, burning– short breaths– spice, spice, Allah– even ginger. Allah– In passion– the chillies.

Smaller scoop, nail size, 'front his lips– ‘Don't just stare at it.’

Trails the hand down– he's cold–
Lips stretch and pause, shuts an emerging sound– biting lips.
‘What!?’
‘Nothing.’ Mouth wide open, shoves the bite in– blinds shut– sprinting out.
‘Don't spit it out!’ Left many grains, saliva reeking of cigarettes.

LIVING ROOM

Knees bending in gratitude, serving plates, mute clattering on Gauri & Saniya's rug. Filling with fine biryani, placing glasses, pouring water, red onions, shed black fungus layers and cut in thin circles.
Munching– tearing apart with pieces of meat. Forever chewing the parts with fat.
Relatives in small circles, crossed knees– finally supper, a life ago was the noon. Life back in their bellies, cheeks stretching through flavours– Kashmiri red peppers.

‘Who puts this much spice in food?' Najiya Lasker throws arms at the glass. 'EMPTYY.’
‘Seems alright to me, Baby,’ mutters her husband, wiping oil off his lips.

Najiya rolls her eyes, standing up– no servers carrying a jug.
Tongue out, on fire.
Pushing teens out of the doorway.
Out of the livin' room turn– head bumps into Zareena Lasker's chin.
‘So…rry! Baji!!’
‘UhhGh, watch it, Woman.’ Pushing her way away.

Ladies at her shoulders like flies. ‘Get away!! Aside! Let her breathe.’
Sahina at her feet, carrying a bowl, with the other hand on Tehreem's cheek.
‘Get away, I said!’
Knees fall down, slaps turn into soft pushes, wipes– no looks back.
‘Please Tehreem, please, look at me….. I'm saying…please have it.’
‘She ate? A bite perhaps?’
‘Fuffi, she's not evenn–listening!'
The bowl’s shaking in her hand, eyes unshaken, patting her head, calling her name.
Only sniffles from Tehreem.

‘Look, beta…Farook sent this for you… now it's your turn.’ Sobs soften– arm sink downwards, peeking through a tiny gap. The small missing bite from the Kabooli plate.
Cries! Hit the fingers, all the grains on the rug.
Cries, muzzle, dripping onto her thighs.

‘You haven't eaten anything!’ Sahina latches onto her fists.
‘Please, Tehreem… I too.. haven't… let's eat together.’
‘Please listen to her, Beta.’

Hush.. Night growing deeper. All the growing stomachs but stubborn like children. ‘Let her be, Sahina..don't force, more than we…. Won't listen.’ Moths flying in, crickets getting louder. ‘Tehreem…You want to go to your room???'

Beer! A drunkard, in the third cousins' circle.
'WHO'S HERE, A TWETTY DRINKER?? GET YOURSELF OUT!’
Turning their heads in astonishment, rats.
‘I will not! Let you torture yourself! Cuckoo-like Sahina's voice.
Fingers bend, claw-like on her jaw.

‘Are you mad!?’ Shaking clinically, her arms. ‘Let! Go!’
‘Baji! What are you doing!’ Yells Sauhana, jumps from behind, clamps on her back.
Sharp nails piercing the cheeks.
‘ENOUGHHH!!’ Swings slap, lands at the temple.
Ugh! ‘Buttt Fuffi!’
Bloody, ruby red. The two nails.
‘Sush! Sahina.’

Iram sprints past her.

'What is this, Sahina!' Holding her palm out– eyes on the bloody nails, on the skin they pierced.
‘Are you ok, Tehreem!!’ One drop, smears– second emerges.

‘PLEASEEEE just eat!...’ Down at her feet.
‘Go! Be in your room!’

Gasp, burning turmeric the murmurs on Sahina’s name.
‘Silence, ladies! Don't.....’
‘She’s not eating, Fuffi, please make her eat.’ Muzzle drenching Tehreem's toes. ‘I don't wanna witness her collapse!!!’

Sauhana patting her back. ‘Come with me, Baji.... just..lets be..somewhere else.’

Blue sky, just as the dress Tehreem's wrapped in. ‘Beta, please eat.’

‘..I don't want to.’

LIVIN' ROOM'S WINDOW.

Many moths have died– yet the living room isn't painted by their blood. The windows are now closed, except for one, high enough for them to not reach it. High enough to not close it.

ZAREENA LASKER

Strands all up front, dupatta slips too, sitting above the eyelids.
Nehal! He was around Farook.
Steps drift, clashing on his arm.
‘Nehal, beta, where's Farook??’
‘Fuffi, everyone searching for him…I'm trying to call him..since morning, he's somewhere only he knows…’ Shrugs.
‘Ugh..Thanks for nothing..’

Knees pop in the backyard way.
Ur welcome, Bua.

Thud! Crappy old rusty door.

The moon isn't present.
Mushy soil.
Tickling the soles.
Bulbs' light fading.

Incredibly quieter the crickets.
Gone all yellows.
Squeaky grass.

AhhHush

Invisible in his black kurta. A firefly sitting in the palm. Turn deep the inhales.
Clogged nose of a liar.
'Your wife is killing herself, and you're here still as…a..a goose!?’ Blinking the firefly like a pulse.

‘Huh!?’ Short breaths. ‘You must've thinking this smearing night… must swallow you… it won't! Brother! You can't escape, none of us…can't…do nothing– You have to!’ *Yhuhh* ‘She's your responsibility.’
‘I can't face her.’

Dying the winged chirpers– or died.
‘Behave! Please…please, don't face her, don't match her eyes, but…’
Lungs too short. ‘Just…*Hush*…SHES YOUR WIFE!’
‘Yes!! Zareena….She can sense the…. She'll read my skin.’
‘Rubbish! She's too deprived to do anything.‘ Crushes grass under his feet, the firefly takes off from his palm. ‘Hide whatever you wanna, but don't hide yourself.’
Cracky steps to the shut entrance.
‘Wait for me..!..wai…’

Ladies gathered in the second living room, the ladies's couch. Calling Farook.
‘Farook! I need to talk to you!’ Sighs Ameena.
‘Not now, Bebo. He needs to be somewhere.’

He's keeping the head down and feet quick. 'Don't forget to deliver him here!!’

Men playing cards, smoking chillum. ‘Fuck off from me..’ Yells Salim to someone, on a cornered bedstead.

Passing by teenagers through the living room.
The rug, dusty, stained, cooking oil– wide mouth adults, messy children. One juvenile, cartoon shirt, munching with each bite, grains falling out, gaps between the fingers. ‘Quit it, Child!’

In the corner, curled her height. ‘Don’ttt just stare at her!… Go.’ Light push on the back.

I.VII

FAROOK LASKER

Silent sobs. Tiny earthquakes at her spine upon each hiccup.
Always needs water when she cries.
That suit– that had his blood. Her tears.
Didn't change.

HUH Long breaths.
Her blood too– rigid and friction; crystallized sweat, now salt, smeared on the blue cotton. Sleeves, armpits, neck, and everywhere her skin's shy.

Head tilts backwards, eyes climbing up– the tall open window.
Sitting in the nose, in between and beyond the copper and salt, is her scent. Raw as how it be.
Wall's cold.
Dark violet sky– star pores, moon a hair strand.

'Cold wall.' Violet– the same shade she adores. All these pores.
'Your back is… since..'
'Don't talk to me.'

'Let me take you to the bedroom…'

Colosseum-like living room, noises still catching.
'Ea-'
'I won't.' Coughs.
Holding rocks against her stomach.

Nod– neck gravitates to her, covered with hair the shoulder.
Withering the stars.

‘You're cold, Farook.’

‘Hm…it's Oct, Tehreem.’ Her hair. ‘Back in our room?..’
‘Hm..’ Yawns.

I.VIII

FAROOK LASKER

The living room crowd, too cold than the room, still eating warm meals.

'WHO'S HERE? CAN'T BATH EVEN FOR A FUNERAL!?' Someone there.'
A hundred people eating. '...In that circle, Leave!...Please! Tell them to leaveee!...Zareena... '
'Farook...what??' Zareena's stumbled words. 'Nehruma! Get the people in another room!'
Tongue drenched in sauce N oil up and down between the teeth, and million murmurs, rats!
Slow! Too slow!
'Why are you not telling them to get out!?' *Huh!* 'Get out!' 'Aren't your bellies full yet!?'
'Stop, Farook... stop..'
'No tell them to go away! This is not a party...'

'Okay...sit, I'll get them out.'

One by one they leaving– snails.
'Baji...'
'Sush! Don't make a scene Farook!' hisses Nehruma.

Bald officials stepping out of the door, freeing air from their presence.
'My condolences, Mr Lasker.'
'I don't know you....' *Ugh*

‘Discourteous bastards! Can't even bath before coming to a FUNERAL! THIS WAS SUPPOSED TO BE A FUNERAL! Not a PARTY!....’ Short breaths– piercing glass in the chest. ‘What you said! Where's Saniya!?

“You can't leave politics behind"... What? They'll scream my name!? Invite strangers to my home... pretending... Have a funeral... FOR WHATTT! FOR FUCKING REASON..really....’
Deeper the shard with each breath.
‘He's dead... yesterday... It's not his fucking funeral..it's not today.. the fuck is this??..what you-all doing...what I agreed to...MY SON ISN'T A TOPIC TO EAT UPON!’
‘Breath, Chacha..’ Knocks at some window panel.
‘Shut it! AT ONES! Send everyone. I want guestrooms empty.. leave it there.’
‘Mamu....’ A glass full of water in her hand. Innocent eyes.
‘Don’t... mind me.....huh..it's night Sauhana...go to your room.’

Every inch of space washing down the belly as sailing the cold sip.
They'll be sighing, sitting down.
Spices, cheap garlic.
‘How heartless you have to be!!? Celebrating? How tasty was that chicken, HUH? What dish has this ugly garlic?
Were those kababs nice, Nehal?’

‘ITS NOT EVEN TWO DAYS SINCE! *Cough* *Cough* ‘Didn't you find an inch of shame, burying your noses in flavors, taste?’ *Cough*
‘What kind of cook adds that much black pepper huh, Salman?’ Tapping on the window.
‘Silent now! Go and drown in cigarettes! Somewhere, here and there, stop this rubbish rant,’ utters Irma.
‘Stop, Ammi.’

‘SILENCE! Leave him alone.’ Zareena pushing their backs– to the exit.

Rug drenched in the scents, fake funeral– spices, spices, spices.
Goddamn spice market.

So tall the roof, a stone cone.
Tens & tens of black metal poles, fans at the bottom, all off.

Wooden scream– thumbing steps–
Moon thinning more and more, need hair products.
Louder the steps.
Annoying jasmine perfume, Salim.

Collar drags up– 'What the fuck did you say!?'
'We're celebrating? Does your brain make any goddamn sense!?' Ogre arms. 'Ate your own drugs!? Jerk.'
Fists clamped onto his.
'We were starving...' Damn the jasmine of Salim's scalp.
Hands fuse off the collar. 'Imbecile! We grabbed whatever was available and only ate out of necessity. 'A PARTY?' Ridiculous...don't you dare to question anyone's grief.'
Cough *Cough*
No crickets.

'What kind of talking was that?... merciless on your own blood, acting this way.. on purpose doing wrong.'
Hushhh '....Don't fucking lecture me.'
'Fuck you..behave, Farook.' Lights too bright. 'And what kinda shit you smoking?? Better to sniff our own product....'

Loud outside murmurs shut at once.
Bhai Sahab– pale face, exhausting breaths. 'What are you?!' Still kids!?'
Salim moves, giving him a hand. 'Here's no problem, Bhai Shab.'

Shaking his head. 'Behave! Farook...you must not need no lec.....Baba's responsibilities, behave.'

The door shuts; one by one flips the light switches– night.

Her corner– cold wall.
Violets left, pores clogged, the shining strand fell or flew away– winds knocking on the windows.

The window's reaching to nothing, no place to run beyond those Ultramarines.

All smooth, the jute rug, arms wrap around, fingers mimicking the way she finds lice in between, the roots, frenzy– eyes shut.

I.XI

TEHREEM LASKER

AH* Heart running like a horse. *Hushh*

Finger jolts further–
falls at foot the thick woolful blanket.

Sweat in the eyes. Cotton wet, glued to the back.
Head rolls at the side– his empty pillow. Eyes rubbing, pillow cover doesn't smell like him.
Neck nudges; he hasn't slept since the day it was cleaned– ungodly, like eternity the past three days.

Cold air. Windows open.
Orange lamp light, his side vacant.
Throat grainy, poky, as if a hair stuck.
Qoooooo!
The train honks – shivers at the back, though filtered by the woods.
1 AM.

Stomach leaned back, touching the spine.
UGH… Empty bottle– Only junk on the table.

Fingers slip; the handle's a little to the left, orange like candles' flickering electricity.

Crickets went to sleep, all quiet.
Murmurs– sitting on upper floors.
Women whisper.

Darkness smearing ink, half the lamps leaking smoke, no rest winds– or low on oil.
Slippery tiles– the rug wave shifted to the corners.
‘Meow.’ At feet jumps a cat– small, muddy, Ispara's.
Purring, mixing with steps.

At chest height the lamps, alive ones, have tall flames.
The dim night light of the kitchen, a giant green portal– winds thrashing, lamps flickering.

Nancy hisses and jumps over the counter.

Dims as the final moments of a dream. Smudges instead of thick boards.
Out of pins, Saniya’s knives.
‘Meow..’ Down the fridge she slips as a stain.

Frost tipping off– big gulps– rain on the drought.
Stomach yawns softened the flaky lips.

A giant Caesar salad the fridge— dragging the door. Shifting like moonlight, the cold blue light.

Eyes squint— thud! Trembling all the bottles– the steps forging distance.

Blackened paths never narrower! Payal ringing as the going winds.
Running to reach him.

Giant black pit, no lamp.
Slaps on the switchboard, turning on numerous bulbs and fans.
'Farook!!' Feet skipping steps– face down, arms flared sideways.
‘Farook!’ Cold. Winds reached him. Chest Motionless. Jolting his shoulders, fingers flaky, arms feathers.
‘FAROOK!’ Slap on the face– sleeping face.

‘Faroook…..’ Shining smooth red lips, resting face, weighted eyelids, light like highlights, rude, the silent lashes, curled as if mascara- ‘FAROOK!’ Hair pushed the rug. ‘Why you never…listen!!’ Haste to the giant doors.

‘Baji!!!!!’
‘BAAAAJIIIIJ!’
‘FAROOOKK’SSS NOT…BAJI!!’
‘SAHINAA!’

‘Oh..Farook…’ So dry his hair– tangling in the fingertips.

‘What happened, Remi!'
Sprinting in, one hand out of her sleeve.
'He's not waking up..he's not breathing! He's he's..why he's sleeping like this! He's always sleeping! Ratchet!’
‘His heart is..slow.’ Back to his chest. Holding his hand.. ‘Yes..slow pulse..’ Fallen off the shoulder, her cardigan.
WHat! Now.. Sighs Zareena.
'He's…not waking up.’ Sahina pushes to the side.
Shaking his body, hammers the fist on the right ribs.
‘Careful!’ yells Zareena. Claw on the back.
'Your brother is stubborn!!! Stubborn..all..’
‘Shut up….He's not dead…’
‘Yes..don't waste time…’ Sahina hooks the last button of the cardigan.
‘Okay.. okay…’ So light his shoulders.
‘Breath, Remi, breath..’ At his other shoulder.
‘Hurry.' Limbs went weight-free. Was never this thin.
'so heavy…He'ss never heavy.’
‘Hm..’ exhales Sahina.

‘Cold…he's cold…’ Stumbling steps. 'Slow, please! Don't drag his feet..’
‘Niyaz! HURRY!’
Skip the tires, off the lime stone, to the road.

‘Everything will be alright…’ Palms blanket over his. ‘Everything will be alright…’ Skinny long fingers.
Warming.

CAR

Niyaz accelerates on the foggy road– the half-open window on his left whispering in the ear, frozen– by time the vast lights of the hospital gallop the windshield.

Alone, taking him on the shoulders, seems light, sparrow.

‘Wait for us Tehreem!’
‘It’s here..what wait..’ Few more steps! To the giant gates.
‘Waitt..’ Nehal sprints out.
‘No need! Call doctors, should be here! Must've ready in the E.R.’

PHARM & MEDIC AID, LASKER/ NEHAL LASKER

‘So…hmm..this whole place is ours?’
‘Hm…no…technically no, I haven't seen dad and uncles claiming it..’
Goal, cap in the dustbin, hot coffee.
‘But the giant white glowing “Lasker” on its face??’ Niyaz drains some sips, lighter flavour.
‘Generally…the one who comes up with the idea takes the credit…’
‘So..whole pharma branch Farook's!??’
‘Yea..’
‘Such big plate, all his..’
‘Hm hmm..’ Lacks sugar, but good for its price.
‘What about your late uncle?’
‘Hm…’ Glass top, smooth. ‘Drugs, Labs.. Farook Chacha turned it into more for, how you say it..public oriented.. free n all.’
‘Poor falk magnet.. wow.’
Off in the air, shatters glass, GOAL! Hit a rock. ‘Hope he'll be alright.’
‘Yea..’ Loud sips. ‘So you thinking about coming up with something??’
‘Idontknow… hotel or something? I already got…green bags and fuck places… Ahm..leaving inventions for my cousins..’
‘Very generous of you.’ Niyaz collects another coffee.
‘Ispara seems like a scientist..’
‘Haha..yea…no…she fights.. have you even seen her? She's a fighter… leave the coffee here..’
‘Fuck coffee, She'll inherite all this?? Lucky.’ That weird low lips of seeing sheer heights.
‘Its already hers, it's not lucky, we all legacy, as dad say, everyone must grow teeth.. to, fuckin chew??…Grow teeth. Your wife got huge pieces of meat.’
‘Now you being rude…’
‘She’s my sis, I can say whatever the fuck I want..Bahahah, Rano laughs at this shit, how she married you?’

TEHREEM LASKER

Beating right. *Dhak Dhak* Pound per pound.
‘What are you smelling..’
‘Tat..I'm listening, finally, it sounds like how it should.’
‘Oh..’
Oh the eyes, Should stay day and night at sight.
‘How it should beat?’
‘Certainly not like these rice.’ Soggy rice. ‘Zareena..been pushing…eat, eat, eat.’
‘No need…if you don't wanna…’
‘You eat right away.. Dr said “Eat!”’
‘He didn't…you saying it.’ Wind on the kitchen window, shameless not leaving.
‘Ok..eat and let's leave to room.’
Cold each grain. Lips open as a bratty child.
‘Your turn.’ Giant scoop.
‘Farook…’
‘You have to join me…’
‘Hm…’ Floods the mouth, rice melts– scorching spice. ‘Can't imagine we ate..’
‘This ain't… no funeral today.. and who remembers what went in our belly yesterday?…’
‘Nothing.’

‘I wanna sleep..’
‘Me too.’

I.X

22 Oct,15

Fucking Noooooo, response.. Three sleeping pills, and 2 Cigarettes in..not a crumb of sleep in my eyes. And that bitch Nehal said, “It's morphine induced”...my ass. My cigs work way better. Gotta ask Chacha for more.
Soo..shit has happend, some quite...hmm..

Been a long time. The last entery.. I'm crying like a bitch for her.. Hahahahhaha.. hilarious.
‘Dont do this to me!...I can't get over you!... I don't understand this.. you're changing.. you're breaking my heart.’ Fucking kill me pls. Hmm.. so to summarise..Riza after all the shit.. said she's straight. Are there pills for that kinda change? Faggots can change?
Resolution?.. Evolution? REVELATION!
Anyway fuck this..
Aariz died. As said, FAGGOTS ARE THE WROSTTT.
I'm angry, my eyes are itchy..I had no plans to cry and shed..but they poured, but..... though there's no fucking meaning.. everything is fucking instictous in life. Impulses wetter than harbour, her-bour...her-pussi... I miss her...hmm..no maybe not.. I miss.. Idk...I looked at her and said, don't hate me.. She said I don't or something... hmm..she was high.. maybe I was....fuck...bitch, Liar. Watch me burn, high in air, in flames, being sanctified of what you changed in me...
Not much just...I'm addicted to masturbation... it's hilarious, the amount of slander Aariz digested..my mocking him jerking his dick.. ahhhh... all of that now seems happy. I was a jerk..it's in my instincts.....
Like Riza’s instincts told her to be straight...
Or she is..and she was just playing with me..don't wanted to end the friendship..all that logical crap nerds give when shit hits the nuts....
Aariz fucked up.. wait..it's hitting..the pills.. it's just 11pm tho..maybethatswhy.

God..Why thoooo? Why not me? His parents are destroyed...Tehreem Mumani crying since morning...I didn't go and see his body...except once.. he had scars.. I don't know what happened..I don't wanna know!
Fuck you.
Or fuck me... I'll borrow your dildos for the time being...

PART TWO

FAROOK LASKER

II.I

Sparrows jumping and chirping, round and round–
A koyal holding the mic,
far away.
One orange neck knocking its beak on the kitchen window.
Flying away, flared little wings, as Arbaz opens the window; air whooshing in.

Grey strands flowing in the reflection of the streamless tea, silver amidst the tea browns.
‘You should rest.’ Zareena sipping from a fancy black cup, shining in her pale fingers. Shapeless in the peripheral vision, ‘Go rest, Farook.’

Tongue dips in the tea drops, lukewarm. ‘Why is it col *COUGH!* co-cold?’

Limping vapours hovering up from the cup, dissolving against the cobalt blue walls. Blues darker than usual.
'Wanna??' Warm cup somehow.
‘I’m good, ma’ lord.’ His fingers tighten around his cup.

‘Go and warm it yourself, you manchild.' Sahina sits beside her, becoming shapeless.
‘Behave now.'
‘Sure…’

Each cup tickling the nose a different way–
Zareena's tea has a half-root of ginger and strong sugar.
Arbaz’s cup got a strong touch of cinnamon.
The cold tea, as like, got a clove, a small amount of ginger.
Ispara made her own tea with honey.

Unlike others, Sahina is having a strong coffee.

‘Where’s your mom?’
‘Where she likes to be…her room…' Eyes at the window, rimming the cup's edge with the spoon for a minute.
Dyed her hair? Whiter.

‘So…you're leaving today? ’ asks Zareena.
Arbaz nods.
‘Likewise, and Ameena’s upset…she cursed you before she left, said she owes you a few slaps…'
'You're leaving Fuffi?’ Finally sips Ispara.
‘Maybe he deserves few.'
‘Yeah right, Sahina.'
'Makin‘ wife scream and all us too…limbs–wise..’ Sahina adds.
‘Shhh.. Yeh, Ispara… well, Tehreem accepting food again, means she can function enough to look for him.. and Allah’s humorous. Now my husband has stopped eating…something with his liver.’
Ispara chokes on her honey tea, gasping. ‘Are you ok…’
Nodding vigorously. Holding her hand out, Zareena sat again after seeing it.
‘My bad, darling, didn't mean to surface the details… Huh… R.I.P. your father. I miss him every day.'
‘Fuffi, health and all to Fuffa..’ *Cough* ‘But it's 7 in the morning…what dad stuff….’
‘Yes…yes…don't mind, you all..’

That jazz band’s merch, some fairy-dust shampoo. ‘You guys are seriously missing out on elaichi.'

‘Grant me a sip, please.’ Her daily race for Sahina’s coffee.
‘Pleasseeeee.’ Repeating in mellow gasps.
‘Such childish sister you got, Ispara.’
‘Shutup..’
‘Yess, shut up, Mamu…, Baji..pls.’
Sahina gulps as much as she can in maybe one sip.

‘Best COF in the world!' Purs Sauhana.

‘Don't disappear again.’ Zareena places her cup in the sink.
‘Hmmmmm..’ Itchy nose bridge. ‘Where were you yesterday??’
'Surviving,' mutters Ispara, morning raspy voice.
‘Make sense.'

‘And you too.’ At head standing on business. ‘Allah…help you smokers…'

‘Stop using Mumani's shampoo, mamu,’ says Sauhana.
‘I won't.’

‘AND USE THE NOSE OF YOURS A LITTLE LESS.’ Zareena leaves the kitchen.

‘Was it that bad???’
‘Yeah,’ mutters all three.
‘As if you don't know.’ Flings a small paper ball at the window.

‘Anyone?..like to fill me in?’ Ispara's cup in the sink.
‘Nah..you good. It's boring stuff.’
Slow nods, passing by–
‘What are you up to??'
‘Bath, cleanliness…. PURIFICATIONNnnn…..You're not gonna use her shampoo today?' Stretching, bending knuckles at the door frame– leaves.

‘She good?’
‘You good?’
‘…Yea.. yuck..kill me if I ever drink cold tea.’
‘Notted.’ That coffee really smelt good.

‘What’s today?’ asks Sauhana.
‘Tilawat,’ says Arbaz, putting his cup down.

II.II

FAROOK LASKER

Fingertips hook on the black cotton, muscled arms glide sideways, parting the curtains.
Her face glowing.
It's not the yellow luminous that just enters; it's her skin, dry– yet, shining.
Flaky lips, a shade when pink mixes with mehroon, all the tiny folds of skin, thin dark strokes. Tracing index– gently plucks a flake off– underneath the tonguetip.

Transparent trails of dry tears,
glass butterfly,
wings down to the neck.
Brown hazy eyelids bouncing off yellows, so bright, dried sleep crust around the corner, near her long lashes– gently mine it out; mustn't shake the pinky.
Small grain like peridot.

Steps hush away from her face.
Clothes shed, a pinch hold– flying off to the wooden basket of used clothes. Hits the wall, falling nearby. Heat pinches, some previously invisible shoulder nerve.
Snatches a towel off the sofa,
to the bathroom.
Her clothes too off the basket, out pouring the sleeves.

Shuts the bathroom door. Smell, piercing smell, mold, nowhere on the wood, well dry; yet somewhere close.

Reflecting hues green as Palestinian olives, the giant mirror of the right wall blurs the naked self, in a rush.

An incredibly frost stream runs down the spine, bones shake in gasps, muscles clench and shrink, pores shut, strands erect– wet.

Eyes fixated on the reflections, a blur of what it is, fists boneless rubbing around, motion’s wet; shapeless shades of the skin, a fair silhouette.

Shivering fingers open her cabinet, her shampoo. A handful onto the left palm. Rich in foam, shame shade in the silvers, swings the rubbed fists.
Long hair, like he had, dark too, in the panel.
Tossing around, no anymore dry the scalp, foam running down.
Aromatic– The same flower he was growing.
YEHHHH!

Shifted the silver panel into itself, stomach dent. Morphing the bright wet silhouette; Waves like in water.

Burning the index’s knuckle.

Water gushing around the toes. Tub’s not entirely white. It is, just a hint, but more so, yellow, a warm mix, like the wax of thin, poor man's candle.

Drizzling drips mimicking rain.

Fine flat ends of the bamboo scrub, rubbing the hands– again.

Soap drops running down the eyes. Trail down the scalp, flooding what were just two dusky shallow puddles in the silver panel. Eyelids not fallin' down.
Her shampoo doesn't burn. Kinder– shops are acid, melt the eyeballs right away.

Fingers twine with its bristles, microscopic needles, reaching fists, elbows, everything in between.

Residue in the tub, calves under dark foamy grey water.

Draining the tub. Warm dew in the eyes, blinks and blinks, an unending loop of red lines, fingertips to elbows.
Mehh Toe flips the bottom tab, sinking mangroves.

Dripping wet, the towel, the leaked strands, mushy front the brows.
Wrapped like a tall hair bun, slips fall onto feet. Drenching wet the towel.
Neck deep in Mother's wooden almirah.
The freezing air hitting the back, the fan's on– Tehreem’s deep sleep snorts.

In the first handful, a strip and a plain black shirt come; the plain black sits on the bed.
Secondly, a blue shirt, another shirt, and a T-shirt, shoving them back in.
Pulls down the wooden chain of the almirah’s bulb.
Tiny chain, side to side. Dim, every fabric warm and full of contrast.
Including a corner of the grey underwear, pulling it from under the rubble, and a pair of trousers.

Sleeping soundly, her skin—
shades livin' beyond yellow air.
Leaving the fan on– the door shuts calmly behind the back.
No lock needed, no one opens unanswered doors.

Wiping people's scents, cheap shoe shines, off the main hall’s floor,
Nehal– Iram, turns her face– such chard, the residue like her eyes.

Staircase reeking of a public space.

Ruined rugs.

A low maple voice sticks at the back on the second floor.
Steps pause at the third step.
‘Farook…’ Stepping out of her room.
‘Hmm?’
‘How are you feeling now?’
‘Good.’
Nehruma nods. ‘Tehreem is awake now, huh??’
Sight narrows far down the corridor; shut Sahina's door.
‘No.’

‘Take care of her and of yourself, this time complete the medication,
Allah, this cold virus. ’ Nehruma trails downstairs.
‘Hmmm.’ Fourth, the steps hurry.

Soles start to trail on the third floor– into the corridor, walking past the doors. No murmurs; relatives left.

Aariz’s door, quiter–
a thick redwood,
not that red.
Rough inscriptions from a fine chisel. “Knock, Knock, Knock.”
Fading charcoal, his sweat, and puberty swollen on the handle–
twitching up and down, locked.
‘Ispara!!’

‘What do you need, Farook?’ Moisture in the air.
The back skips a breath as it turns–

Saniya Lasker standing at the very edge of her room, the towel bun barely containing her gleaming ivory strands.

‘Nothing, Baji, mm..I was wondering, who..locked this.’
‘Maybe Ispara.. she has a spare key, let me call h-’
‘No, it's fine.' Steps rush forward.

Wider the passage with each step– lengthiest corridor. Accompanying the way, borders left by paintings of Sohail's– missing canvases.
Moving blur the empty aged squares, a blur in the corners of the eyes.

Harmonic high tones preaching from the drawing room, recitation, melodic– Ispara's voice, grittier than her mother's.

Ispara and Sauhana on the sofa, crossed legs, the tuition posture, copies of Kalam-e-Paak in their laps –index drifting left at a fast pace. Finally cleaned, new bandages on the fists.

Walking past the sofa, the first few shelves to the end bounds of the drawing room.
Knees shrink, the stool under Sohail’s desk, same wood, double xerox of the dust.
Drowned stains of oil, now just darker patches, drowning splatters of acrylic.
Stool settles before the second last shelf, sequels upon one foot, its one uneven leg, leans to the right at last. The fifth row alone for the attaché, red silk.

‘Called me..?’ asks Ispara.
‘No, please continue.’ Stepping out.
‘Mamu, are yo-?’
'I'm doing all fine, Sauhana, thanks for asking.'

‘He looked fine to you? ’
Ivory gives a single hum.

II.III

SAHINA LASKER

Pigeons, white and grey, few with rainbow necks, high-flying minority.
Spreading their wings and flying over the small terraces of the far-situated buildings.
Distorting ears with flaky sounds of feathers, flipping aggressively, high ascent so bright against the sky.
‘Boo.’
‘ALLLAHH!’ The heart bumped against the palm, silent for a breath.
Chest sinking. ‘There are politer ways to kill someone!!!’

Trailing away in his noiseless steps. Face as dry as the "boo."
Black shirt, just as he wore– Tehreem's habit to buy things in a couple of two.

Ain't present the usual "gotcha."
Uuuhh Settling, slowing– at its pace. Long breaths, hands fall down the chest.
The red silk attachè in his hand. Of course, the Quran reads.
Slightly bend to the very side as if it weighs twenty kilos.

Heartbeat leaving the ear canal– pigeon's wings flipping.

The attaché on the bedstead, blue his fingernails– leading red lines.
'Fucking manchild...'
Droplets tipping off his hair ends.
'You're not reading...?' Clicks on metal switches of the attaché.

'Hmm??' Blue hardcover copy of Kalam-e-Paak in hand.
‘Going…….for a bath.’ Steps passing by, not smelling like her today.

Down the stairs.

FAROOK LASKER

Burning eyes, drowning in salted water– tiny veins puffed with her shampoo's smell.
White & sharp, the stars bestow, the page reflections of the gold Arabic letters.

Sharp snorts– tears run up with the breaths.

Beginning with the name of God– exquisite, sharp black calligraphic kalimats–

Lips shiver, index crawling left; a hum escapes.

Sand and sand in the throat, smoke and smoke in the voice– high notes climbing to find the right pitch.
Each Haroof holding something– memories and smudges of mother's hums like a folksong, blossom.
Cough! Cough!
Read aloud, Mother, Gauri, Aariz. Other petals of the bud yield in the shadows, whisper in their corners: Saniya, her daughters.
Hums and pitch.
Hum first, then tone.
Index returns at the starting corner.
How mother hummed? Those theist vocal vibrations.
Gauri sang like a folk song.
Timid breaths, pouch up the tongue.
Starting with the name of God.
Lips crawlin'.
Vibrations.

Lapis lazuli, suspended on the page bounds, exceeding its bounds, queer– intoxicating the air.
Mixin' around–
Cough! Cough! Cough!

Throat grunts, snorting, leaps to the edge– spitting out the green gunk.

A rainbow-necked pigeon on the edge of the bedstead staring, jolting its neck left and right– Mehroon eyes.

Sophisticated words in blue square. ‘Bismillah.’

Lips shuffle– folding with no restraint.
Adam's apple twitching like butter in a pan, pronunciation right from the depths of the chest.
Salt water drips down the cheeks onto the page.
Vibrations turning into folk-
Cough! *Cough!* *Cough!*

Rainbow-neck jolts up! Darting loud wings– clinging onto a rope hoop.

Lapis in the air, more present on the next page, sitting in the corners of the eyes.
Salt water.

Though, waterproof the gold ink.

Lips pause and fades the echoic tones.

Pages turn, one by one, Surahs finishing, curly ends; stomach warping, earthquake grunts.
Sky’s Black-N-Yellow.

Stomach's beg filling the absence of thunder,
the hardcover falls.
The Kalam lifts to the temple, almost invisible the lip's vibration, a whisper.
Lungs silently expand.
Eyes open, Kalam-e-Paak back in the attaché.
Twitch the switches, trap lazuli.
Achhu

Sleeves indulge, drying eyes, softer the linen.
Lashes curl, a sheen roars in the sky– such shine without sun.

Climbing down, the same flapping pigeon coos.

Enormous, the year's monsoon, trees fat as politicians.
All white the luminal staircase–
from the terrace to the third floor.

Broad white strokes.
The thick brushes and paint Saniya has in the storage room.
Painted in an instant, broad strokes on all three walls whenever Aariz splattered shades after 2012.

Silence in the drawing room.
Empty spaces and a couple hundred books.
Attachè back to its place. Sight in a rush at its turns, stool left before the bookshelf.
Dust on the books, curtains still.

Shut every door.

Saniya's too.

Marching ahead to the stairs: low eyes, two burning cigarettes between her lips, white smoke 'front the eyes, leaking through the nose.
‘Watch the floor, kid.'
‘I was..in fact watching the floor.’
‘Have you eaten!?’
Exhales, cloud crumbles like fog. ‘It's 4 in the afternoon, Mamu, everyone has eaten.’
‘You?’

Dragging nods.

‘And two at once?? No more cigs, Ispara.’ Stepping away. ‘Come down and eat A.S.A.P.’
‘Mamu…….’
‘Yea..?’
NhHh! She clears her throat, cigarettes out, one almost finished, pinky-sized, the other recently sparked, long as a palm.
‘Out of ration…’
Soggy, the sharp corners of the eyes, red.
‘Two at once??’
‘Oh, this?? I saved it yesterday for later, and..’ Jumps to the ear. ‘I just sparked it to see Iram Mumani’s face, hehe..’
Hush ‘Wow..’ Jumps back– stomping the pinky-sized.
‘More.’ High in authority.

‘Pleaseeee.’

‘Okay…’ Striking natural kajrari eyes, just like her father.
Dry scalp. ‘Mend your hair, kid.

Feet keep forwarding to the staircase. ‘I'll tell Nehal, he'll bring you some…’
‘Nehal’s toooo nosy!!’
‘Just visit labs, mention my name, no one will stop ya.’ Skippin'stairs.
‘Thnxxx….!.’

‘I HOPE YOU'RE MOTHER HEARD EVERYTHING.’

Chuckles

FAROOK LASKER

II.IV

Her skin, such exquisite shade– feel not fair, feel–
high, so high, heaven.

Reds similar to her lips, bouncing off the bedsheet, poorly settled like snakes around her thighs.

Brushed knuckles, gliding down, to the red snakes that poorly covering her–
lifelines, lustrous folds around the relaxed joints.
Tracing index– soft surface.

Folds shimmer in shadows as knees fold, shifting; Tehreem groans.
Ankles charge, self-throw– weighing the whites below, elbow lands on the pillow.

Tired lungs trapping air against her spine.
Her air–
biased flavours, sweat.
Stomach grunts.
Low colours, eaten away by shadows; wind swept the window.
'This whiteness is killing…' Further fine strokes on the red lips, stretching, bunny-like yawn. '…..killing me.'
Wrapping her arms.
Linen chocks, its ridges gasping.
Always onto some lullaby– her heart.

'We'll… *Gulp*… Change… the ceiling.' Warm, her skin– damn the distance– damping her pores, preaching to her atoms. 'Whole ceiling, architectu…., shadess…'

Lips longing close, to be close, close to her– to her, to her lips.
Pinks floating, goin' forward,
reds prophesying fire.
Her fingers fixing on the collarbones, a mountain climber.

Smooth pinks against her flaky reds, morphing together into each other.

'Structu…re, shape, materi…alsss.., fanss…….mmmmm…everything.'

In her grasp the neck, all hers the upperlip.

Nose throbs. *Hush* Like an ancient memory, like a passing mother with an infant.

Her resting breaths against the collarbone.
Wet linen.

'What?…you thinking?' Pulling the chin, firmly in her finger's grip.
'Mhmm.'
Highly drowning her eyes, some trench, mossy trench.
'Are you lactating???'
Eyebrows stretch as ever when she wants to hear the said thing again.

The red sheet below her collarbone, wet.
Chest gently pushing itself into hers.
College nights.

Warm– the drops, dripping down.
Almost transparent, sticking to the skin; Kohinoor to her crown of scents.
'You know what it means!!'
Fixed half-open eyes, at the palm, small puddle of her essence. '……..Say it.' Her hands shakin'.

‘Stop talking….’ Burying her face into the chest.
‘Tehreem…’ Tears. 'Don't shed them…you're mother…after…Allah…Tehreem!! You're a mother..’
Stomach grunts.

Her sharp nosebridge dampening deeper into the linen.

Sniffle. ‘This whiteness is so fucking odd, Farook.’

Buttons stretch, one by one in her steady hands, eyes down, lashes hiding the mirrors.
Throws the black shirt.
A drop sitting on her heights, falls down in the naval– ticklin' its lifefulness.

Leaning, pressing herself– floods the navel.

Drenched.
Galloped the sight in one full scoop; all now is shadows.

Like warm winter’s bath, wet, warm & in her arms.
No friction.
‘Don’t need…the sun….’
‘Silence.’
Limb looseness– warm– she’s warm.
‘Its a boy..’
‘Mmmmh??’

Overflowing abdomen, the slippery trail flowing down, soothing veins in high blood flow.

Her arms rail the shoulder straight, true, so damn white the ceiling. Belly licking depths, all her weight.

Gleaming forest-green eyes, close, so close, blinding; her hair, her lingering shampoo, a note only hers.

Lips– sharp teeth.
‘Amhhhh!’
Her long arms slithering, gripping the neck and greys.
Sinking, the white sheet behind the back, ocean– no anchor.

Arms sleeping on her back, ears drowned in her softness, nose…catching blood?
Blood.
Teeth in the trap, canines in the flesh. ‘Ahh!’.
‘Teh…waHt……’
Hugging the neck, an arm scarf. ‘AHHHHH!’

‘Don't fucking lie to me!!’ Flies her arm, jolts the neck to the other side.

Ear buzzing.
‘DONT YOU FUCKING DARE, LYING!! TO ME…’

The pout, the folds, the reds stretch that way when something's obvious in the air. Unbreathable.
All on the nose, the unshedding tears, darting greens.
Spits, staining the white sheet– covering herself in her red sheet.
‘ANSWER!’ Soft palms cramp on herself. ‘Answer me!’

‘Wha..’
‘Please…I begged you, yett…..Those fucking gaps on my son's face weren't…YOU DIDN'T EXPLANED YOURSELF!!……CAN'T be a fucking tree?’
‘Wha..’
Itching the cheek, burning, palm left a heating print.
knees crawling– close to her.
‘My son didn't fall from…fall, it's not a tre…..’
Sinking, throwing away the hands, slamming her fists on the chest.
Glass bangles shatter.

‘Tell me…please, what happened to my son..’ Tears, soap her tears, melting cheek with each drop. ‘Just tell me, Farook’
Goin’ cold, rubbing her back. ‘How to??’

‘How to???’

NAJIYA LASKER

II.V

Auhhh..
Shaking like a cheap grinder. *Ufhmmaaahhhh*
Like earthquakes, trashing sea waves.

‘Auhmmhhhhh..’ Sinking fingers, OAH fuck the Angel, that speaks to Sun, this heat would never leave.
The woollen kerchief has fallen away– failed moisture control.

Loving-machine set on up & high, the highness mode. If only Ahad were as human as the buzzing loving-machine.

‘Mhhhh..AHH.’ Head slippin’ back to the bed edge, love-machine further pushing in the soft edges– head's a lost edge.
Flesh and mattress, one. The same flesh, sinkin' crazy.
Skull sat over, crushing the kerchief.
Rub, rub, rub!
Close to the world’s edge.
Arching back cracking like autumn leaves.
Fluids leaking, all wet the loving-machine. Fingertips.

‘Hmm……mmm…’ No-nail pinky crawls in the mouth, teeth on it too tight, damping as a pacifier.
Sight drags– surrounded in sort of similar shades, shining blacks, privacy’s cost.
Nose pinches, neck jolts away from the wedding frames.

‘Mmmm! YESSS!!’
Soft– it's head, endlessly thumping, knocking every corner & folds.

‘AHHHHHHH!!!!’ Legs bounce, hitting the wooden frame, narrow bed; no more than Ahad’s legs.
Muscles clench in screams, summer, haze, morning, smoke & stream.
‘Hmmuphh.’

Slipping the soggy fingers as back bends up the rustling blanket. Drippin’ wet thighs.
Glistening, a web around the fingers.
Tongue tracks its length– warm copper-induced lemonade without lemons.

‘Fuckkkkk…..’ Soaking puddle on the pink blanket.
‘Think..think..thi…’ Knees stretching, feet thrashing to the depths of the wide, narrow walls of the room.

Scrounging Ahad’s bags– grips on a narrow glass bottle of cologne, strong, red roses.

Running back to the left, passing the bed– empty all the buckets.

Thrashing the blanket into the bucket, pouring it all to the final drops.
Red rose.

Huh…. A long Breath–
Cold as if a breeze flew by, down there– drops tipping down to the thigh, slippin' further to the toes.

Neck rolls at all four walls; empty all the water bottles.
Pulling the pink blanket, rubbing it down, freezing the cologne, wipe, wipe, wipe.
Red rose. 'Yuck!'
‘Fucking! Dogs!!’

ISPARA LASKER

II.VI

‘Still..no mints?’
‘Nahh..’ replies Pallavi. ‘Bhaiya said he'll get ‘em…when I mentioned you want them.’
‘Mmm.’ *Cough* Puff pushes out. ‘HMHh!!!’

Spitting out on the road– golden dust with wings, flying in the mosphere.
‘What about the boy you told me about?’
‘Oh..don't ask, Ispara.’
Leaking smoke, warm, passing through, clean nasal ways.

Steps drift to the shop– flaps the old wooden semicircles on both sides.
Empty stool beside her; Pallavi's face withdrawn, like the very day.
‘Fill me in.’
Her eyes turn. ‘Okk.’

Ears remained standing through the whole tale– two cigarettes down, ash rained, grey Pallavi’s black paints.

‘Really???… Motherfucker…’
Dripping, fat single tears.
Warming her hands, spitting, the filter bud flies out. ‘Sush..that turd can't dare humiliate you, Lav….we'll punish him….’
‘Everyone was laughing and..and… I ran away.’
‘Ohh, don't….cry…sush..girls don't cry,’ Wiping her wet dark circles, slumping white oversized sleeve.

‘How was physics tho?’
‘Fuck you.’ Evading the sleeve holding half-fingers.

‘Haha… groundin’ you with some bullshit.’
Pallavi grins with her dry sniffs.
Mom’s kerchief, nails bend, eyes pause, looking at the nose.
‘Noo.. friendship breaks when…one friend wipes with their friend’s kerchief.. remember? It's like giving it back the hmm..’
‘Shut up…’ Slams the white cotton softly in her palm.
‘Haha..’ Swift wipes. ‘I won't' return this..’
Smudges kajal on the whites.
‘There were so many of them..’
‘So many fuckin’ myths..that whole group, Riza, Safiya, and others..brats, writing quirks as morning notes.’
‘Lived life…she was creative tho…’
‘Yea..’ Sniffles. ‘I feel fuckin’ worse.’

Petting her stiff shoulders. ‘He’ll feel the same, Lav…’ Smoke flirting with tastebuds on its way out. ‘Worse maybe…’
Static nods– stretching her nose away from the smoke.

‘Mints, pls.’ A bitchy-raspy voice, coins tapping on the plastic jar.
‘No mints! Go away.'

Tickling noise, damn coins– ‘Mamu???’
‘Hey kiddo.’
‘I gotta sound better than that…’
‘Can you pass me some…mints.’
‘Nope…nothings here..’
‘Sucks,’ says Pallavi.

No smells, not even the shampoo, working Ebony.

‘How many sticks you got?’ asks Farook.
‘…Few…’

Midway in the air his stretched, empty palm.
‘Mamu…’ Eyes roll. Sleeves too.

Handing over the black stick of smoke.

‘Here.’ The other fist in the air.
‘Now what??’
‘Tap-tap.’
Thin bandages on his knuckles, a soft slap– four golden coins yielding in the yellow air.
‘Hmm?’
‘Baji left 'em for you..’

Solid, smooth, no engraved shapes or ridges.
‘Gold, don't let 'em slip through your pockets.’
‘Thnxx…’

‘Your uncle??’
‘Yea..’
‘Seems like brother.’
‘He’s chill..’
‘Oh…lucky…and young.’
A sweet flip sound, a sharp glare, wow– the toss energy, catching it in the air. ‘Party?’
‘Nahh..moodd sucks..’
‘I HEARD “BACARDII”

Mood in the mosphere, condom brand and shades of emotions, air thick, fluid and salty.
Throws a napkin, crumbled in a ball. ‘Bacardi sucks, Ispara…’
‘Shut up, bitch…''

SAHINA LASKER

II.VII

Gradual purples bleeding around the horizon– God loves blue– slicing the air, black clouds thin as swords.

‘Would you join me?’

‘...Mm,' replies Tehreem.
Paintings– Aariz’s paintings on the four long pillars.
Figures, acrylic but broad strokes, charcoal.
Flat like on thin ice, head in sync with sight– up and down.
‘He licked his hands afterwards?’
‘...No!..All of that ugliness, me acting like Nosferatu, and, and that??’

Faces, raw strokes, grey and rainbows.

‘I would've if I was your ungrateful husband....’ *Hush...*

TEHREEM LASKER

Look at me! Loud footsteps becoming louder; Slips her arm goes over the shoulders. ‘Look.’
Leaning close, arching steps to the terrace edge.

‘Hmm??’
‘Its pretty.’ Purples mixing around yellows, a thin layer of darkness stretching its legs between them.
Tipping, like a muzzle, her shaky fingers.
‘You’re off them, right?’

‘Hmm.’ Grinning eyes. 'Of course, fuck drugs.’
Holding them in her palm, long nails.

Evading her eyes.
‘Allah…I won't break your oath, Reemi, I'm off drugs.. you don't believe me??..Hmm? May my heart burst, if I'm lying.’
Drowning ochres. ‘You don't believe me?’
‘No…’
‘Oh..don't be my mom..’ A tear falls.
Eyes fountain, any lighter and million drops would flew by–
Tear trail– soaking in the violet dupatta.
Black as night her hair.
‘Or be properly…’
‘Stay still.’
‘You kno….lemme drink milk from your ta-tas.’ Her arms, wrapping around the back. ‘Kiddin…not really, though.'
‘Goofball.’

‘I appreciate… how warm you are, Reemi..’
Resting her face on the chest, holding out the hand. ‘SEE NO MORE SHAKE…’

Clear the faint shake.

‘What this reminding you of?'
‘...Him..’
‘And that's why we have to endure! Farook's hiding something.. It's on his face. I can see it, can't you?’
‘I can.’

‘Yesss, It's no fucking tree! Terrible excuse!...Ask, argue, maybe attack...again.’ Licking her teeth. ‘Farook has to talk.’

‘Won't be able to hide for long whatever it is....’
Drooling sunrays. ‘It's killing him..and seeing him like this..Allah...it's killing me.’
‘Huh...I like the...the way you love him.. it's....’ *yuck*
Tat Swings her hands just like her, soft.

Sun finally out of its den.

Orange sheen, Tehreem's face, heaven, lips– the holy stairs.
'Didn't know when you became my sanctuary... wanna take you to motels, want to write your name on my walls.’
Chuckles. ‘Shut up.’
‘You know you can borrow my lipgloss?’ Looking flaky but incredibly soft. 'Do your teeth hurt? Let me look..’
‘Stop, Sahina...’ Pushing out of the side hug, holding the railing. 'Finally! Home.’

Farook in the yard.
'I gotta cut my nails..'
'Don't.' Wiggles her glass bangles.

A spark sticking out of his mouth.

‘Do those cigarettes really taste that good?' Eyebrows to the sky in curiosity about him.
‘Hmm…'I don't know, their smoke doesn't burn the nose, it's kinda numbing.’
‘I should try it.’ Saying under her sounding breath.
‘Noo!…those are probably addictive.’
‘Like every other fucking thing in this life.’ Shrugging the shoulders

Soft sigh. Going away.

‘You broke my heart…you lied…to me!??’
‘Oh..Stop with that, Sahina…’
‘I knew it! Understand..way before your husband did..’
Violets similar to the sky, all shades, good on her, gleaming, complimentary.
Covering her strands.
Slim back, perfect body.

Climbing down the stairs.
‘Easy..Oye, don't slam your feet!'

'Uh…pregnant..'
Last orange blisters popping by the shard of Night’s darkness. Spreading legs in day's mouth.

II.VIII

FAROOK LASKER

Crickets chirping, frogs croaking. A Jugnu couple flying together beyond the eye. Or– rested on shapeless grass.

Payal chirps, enters something spicy.
‘Hold this.’ Tray, two covered bowls.
Wiping the bed– Tehreem places the black dining rug on the bed.
Silverware lands on the blacks.
‘Go wash your hands.’
‘Hmm.’

Towel throws on the sofa.
‘You didn't start?’
Nods.

Beans, green, smelling…odd.
Eyes down, a crack emerges on the roti, a small bite.
A bigger one, before her, eyes elsewhere, eatin’ her own.

Slow chews.

Another piece, trapping the beans inside, to her mouth– eatin’ her own, small bites.
‘What??’ Her brows raise, lashes hanging low.

‘I’m sorry, Tehreem.’ Jolts the peeking cigarette out of the shirt’s pocket.
‘Don’t talk to me.’

Own short bites.
Don’t talk to me.

Ears buzzing, limbo.
Down, moon-like, unobtrusive face.
Eating another bite by herself.

Blank the window with blacks. Blues left.
A moth, white wings, sitting on its edge.
‘I should close it.’ Sighs.

Cough! Cough!
Gasping. Wide Mouth.
Feet run across; deep in the sinking matters, steel glasses fall–
‘Easy. Easy.’ Kneading palms against her back.
‘Auhhhhh.’ Fingers covering the mouth.

Giving her a glass of water.
‘Eassyy.’ Pets, more pets.
‘It.. *Cough* Hit my throat.’ Gulps.
‘Sush..’ Rub, rub.'It's all ok now, don't worry.'

‘Enough.’
Pushes the glass away.
Teary her eyes. Wet the sheet, three glasses fell.
‘Feeling better?’
Nods.

The tray slides to the left. Moisture trapped on her cheeks.
Fingers on the shoulder, glide–sniffling, unbuttoning.
A tear pierces the skin.
‘You didn't even clean it??’
‘It smells like you.’
Gentle as a feather. ‘Hurts?’
‘Kinda.’
‘Ughhh..Allah’ Her tongue on its outline, lips filling its gaps.

‘Consider it healed now.’

‘Hmm..’ A bite, she's holding out, close to the mouth.
'It's bad, no?'
‘It's alright….kinda..’ Green beans– only Tehreem can make them edible.
‘Who made this?..’
‘Najiya…’.
Dry gulp, beans, big dust particles.
'Let's go cook eggs.’

TEHREEM'S

Turns the stove knob.
High blue flames. ‘Grab the nonstick one.’
Tapping on the silver one, notorious to burn.
‘Too high?.. Which one?'
Short legs. Flames shrink to tiny sprouts.
‘On your side, black back one...'

Flares, fridge’s blue light. ‘Three?’
‘Take...five...?’
‘Hm...’ Calcium shells cold as ice cubes.
In between on the counter: the vegetable basket, five eggs– door shut.
‘Onions?’
‘Hm……’
‘In the canister, Farook...'
'Gotcha...' The old tiny latch of the wooden canister always speaks of its presence. ‘Can you add cumin while I'm cutting these?’
'Sure...'
On the second tier, glass flask. ‘How much?’
'You know.’
Two pinches.

Sizzling– summer. 1995- chewing on cumin-rich fried rice, college students selling snacks, legs stuck on 1st gear, all walk it was, the first date– cheeks bloomed like a red rose.

Now so pale. Warm, but not the skin's shade.
Ruby red tomatoes, cold as thin ice, his face; the dry reds.

‘Your face was as red as this tomato...wedding day..’

‘Hehe.’ Sharp cuts on the white onion using his sister’s knife. ‘My cheeks were aching… I smiled all day.’
‘I know.’ Firm tomato meat, no leaks.
Onions making him sniffle.
‘His face too..bloomed like a rose, red and….’
Oil sneezes like an old man, all tiny red pieces in the pan. ‘How little he was…’
‘….We… suppose to add onions first…’ His fingers pause, words came out after stumbling first.
‘Light. His face, hollow! There, I said it. Hollow… those fucking long… that was…’ Snatches plate from underneath his hands, long lousy pieces. No end to the pan's cold. ‘My son's face…like that..’
Knob turns to high flames.

Damn blue walls, at least some colour.
Green chillies, light, lemony. ‘Are these hot?’
'Hmm…'
'Well, don't stop…one onion won't do..’
‘Mhh.’
Spring in their butts, jumping off the white seeds. Must've inhaled all the notes leaky by each cut– in the pan, three chillies suffice.
His weight shifts to the left- opening glass doors of the utensil cabinet. Hands on a big silver bowl.

Stirring, cumin, tomatoes, onions, chilies, hugging each other.

Up in the air, the Damascus knife, a precise middle cut. Four more to go.
‘Say what your mom used to say?’
‘Nah…it's just…useless thing.’
‘Uhh..say.’
‘Ok..’
Second cut falls on the second shell.
‘Say!..’
‘I did…’
‘Loudly.’
‘Oh..you…’ Third egg in the hand, knife half in the air. ‘White egg, head to toe, ya be fe-or-male, Allah hu akbar… Allah…three times… enough?’
‘Hm…’

Something his mother taught him.
“Each egg can be something if not food.”

‘Spices??’

Neck tilts up, spices in the second cabinet.
‘Here.’ Pathiya screeches on the floor– still short, straightens his toes– fingers too. Two inches up the handles.
‘Uh..Farook..’ Arms hook around his waist, Up– back to the similar weight, still lighter.
‘Down now, pls…’
Four narrow jars in his hand.
Mixing yellow yolks. ‘Pass me…'
'Here, take all..’ Fix them in the basket.
Fingers slide to the back.
Tat Arms around the back, slithering like sand mole.
Sneaky sniffs.
‘You smell like heaven’s gate.’
Piercing his nose bridge.
And– his rapid blood flow.
Fingers moving like nursery rhymes on the belly.
‘Such hate I feel against me, not knowing this sooner… which month?’
‘Third.’
Gentle shakes, chilli powder, garlic powder, garam masala– changing shades of the eggmix.
Naughty fingers, warm and tickly as candle flames.
‘I know you understand…and all, but..’
'Of course, I know Farook!... You're his father; I know it's horrors…Allah, you saw him first, in that… I understand…'
Whisking faster, thousand swirls.
‘I don't blame you, Farook..or anyone else…it's just fucking hard to even… what happened..’ Circular motion, dripping egg mix off the bowl.
‘And stop poking that thing in me.'
Chuckles.
‘Shut up.’ Erect the flames.

‘You swear you won't smoke.’

‘I’ll stop…right from this very moment.’ So tight his arms, woollen scarf.
His fingers reach, grinding on the sides– loosen, lowers the flame.
Calves stretch, tongue around the ear. ‘Let it simmer, please.’
Summer.
‘Ever… thought..hmm.. about killing me?
Circular motion of his fingers pauses for a second. ‘Once..’
‘Really?…just once…?’
Stir, stir, the pan yet cold the fork. ‘When…..’
‘When?’ His neck jolts away. *Achu* ‘Huhhh…. First add garlic and… dry spices…'
Knife on garlic's little vase, scratching down the sharp tip. Glides towards him, grooving on his collar.
‘It's sharp, Tehreem.’ Eyebrows stretching up. ‘Ok..’
Knife in his fingers, that skin so well with Damascus swirls.
One and two, a few stirs, knocking in spices, garlic.

Dirty his collar, black lines & sweat. ‘Go on…’
‘Your fingers reeking of chillies..’
Oops ‘So don't lick them..’
Hot the strands, mixed delightfully with the black ones, light, fluffy-flowy.

‘The time…when you wanted to call your father.. before the..’
‘Miscarrage… I remember..’
‘That cunt humiliated us..you, against all that crowd.. I wish I was the cancer that took him..’
‘I also despised that.. Baba didn't deserve that call… But I'm glad..you didn't take revenge.’
‘Hm..’
‘You didn't break your promise.’ Shirt all black, sweaty back.
‘Hey.. that tickles.’
‘You grey hair wonders me.. endlessly.’
‘Ufff, the stress you givin’ me.’
‘Shut up..’ Flames turn off.
Taking plates out.
His arms yearn back– fuller lips stamping, making jello out of the muscles, neck leans to his side.

‘I wanna give you a love bite too.’
‘What stoppin’ you?’
‘It's awfully painful.’

Damped the skin almost an inch deep, redness.
‘Piece of art.’
‘Sush!’ Fitting perfectly the teeth in his skin. No gap on the love bite.

‘Hurts?’
‘No.’
‘Liar.’
'See, you caught it in a blink… That's why I don't.’

Tastes exactly him. His salt and soul. ‘I’ll bite you.’
‘Again..’ Farook sniffs. Swiftly to the side.

‘Those beans, holyyy God…well…’ *ESHHH*
Ispara exhales.

‘Yea..we don't disrespect food,’ says Farook.
‘Yea, yea, yea.’
‘Hungry? We made eggs..’
‘It smells wonderful, Mumani..’ Sitting on the counter.
‘Are you drunk…?’
‘Mamuuu….I already had a session with…Mom, Yar..’
‘Jus.. askin.’
‘Bacardi..’
‘Show me your knuckles..’ Red– the supposed to be short brown bandages.
‘They fine, Mumani.’ Brushed, duck-tapped around fingers, damn walls.
Her nose twitches when she lies, just like her mother.

‘Come sit,’ says Farook. Three plates on the carpet.
‘Such a pal he is… find me a househusband too, Mumani.’
‘Oh, I will..don't you worry…’
Filling the glasses.

‘Here.’ A small bite sat in his fingers.
‘It’s hot, Farook.’
‘No..I blew the heat away.’
The cumin and overly added garlic.. perfect.
Licking the fingers as he takes the bite, such a child.

‘Not me???’ says Ispara.
‘Sure.’

Her grinning face. No breaks on the smile.

‘From Mamu?.’ Farook stretches his hand with a small bite in it.

‘Her too.’ Ispara gulps, pointing at Nancy sitting near the water bottle.

II.IX

Some fucking oct and 20...15

If I could see your walls I could see you fakin' if punched it enough I would see our faces.
I know you love me... itsnjust, just how it is! You won't be able to hide it Riza! Don't even try! It'll surface as a cancer? Don't hide your love for me.. it'll kill you, the intensity and sincerity I felt, it'll be a biohazard.. But if it'll kill you...than it's not love.. Don't die, please. Please never die. Never, not on me... Or around me.. but one day we'll... is it why you move away? Shelter in another car? Away from me? How far you'll go?
There aren't ppl like me...no one can lick you like I can!
Forgot everything???
Your breasts were hills on my face, Baby!
Upset that i fucking knocked that flower guy?!
How I will again!
Punches on that short brown faggot, legs broken... nose and ribs, you didn't give a fuck! How he asked ur hand. I was supposed to chug and watch that?? I ain't cuggin. Hope you remember how I broke his limbs. I broke his limbs! Would again, anyone.
You were mine!
White gold ring on your white fingers. Made the fucking ppl high...
"Has to be self earned money" I said in that mirror.
You had no right throwing it from your balcony.
White the perfect shade, you changed. Don't you remember?? Why don't you?
I know you hate me now....it's quite alright. I wwas so off ease...I wanted to goto prison, so you'll always know where I'm at.. ohhh as if you care...
You don't!
Why it tooook such much time! But I was capable to change you....what changed... have I got too high...again... high?
You broke my heart, 2013 never really left so i should hate you now??

Don't you remember anymore, the memories how so futile..what we did, all the years..
Naked here on my bed enormous times. At the back of my brother’s Jeep, hills, woods, school, lake, you were wet in me, around me, around those places.. wrapped in these white sheets.
Went so dry like that fucking! Summer!
“I love you too.” You Didn't Fucking Meant.
All the other things you said.. you didn't mean.
All the things you did.. Am I too easy to smash like a fucking controler?...
I hope he's dead, I HOPE ANYONE WHO'LL LOVE YOU DIE!
NO ONE CAN LOVE YOU LIKE I CAN.
I WISH EVERYONE DIE EXCEPT US.

Part three

SANIYA LASKER

III.I

Underwater, thumping eardrums.
Muffled buzz, drowning sirens of hurricane, close to the ears; far.

Vintage clock, sharp tick, limping.

Concentrating the giant panels, ugly yellow.

Noiseless fans on the white ceiling crawling in circles.
A spider in the center, black, long spikey legs, slurping a fly.

Limbs static, still asleep.

***

Air blew in, impatient.
Sky got jaundice; clouds black those capsules. Concise breaths– nostrils filter buds– spitting out, window shut.
Walls, even the bricks stretched far, under the yellow hue.

***

Underwater, no buzz, no bees, flooded ears, nothing but silent whooooo-ing,
lost edge hurricane.
Brain freeze.

Arms and legs on the tub edge, hanging low.
Arctic water further chiseling the sharp bridge of her nose.
Such fullness for someone so fit, floating jellyfish.

Hitting 100KGS squats back in the day.
Didn't like being called Ivory; passed that name to her daughter.
“Call me by name. Names already have the intimacy, Sohail.” She said.

Saniya submerged, holding all the light in her ivory hair, floating at a pace, mimicking autopilot, just like her bath breaths. Large lungs, no scales, yet mermaid.

No fear of a runny nose.
No yellowness underwater.

***

Brushed knuckles on the strands, thin and shining like spiderwebs – making a bun, round, wet and tall.

Facing her wardrobe, American Holly.

Pointing index–
White? Silver-white? Grey? Navy-grey? Silk-grey? Rosy-grey? Ivory? Snowwhite?

Getting grey patches, the white shirt, girth of the back muscles holding moisture, cotton slips on slim wet skin.
Over a grey cardigan, cream trousers.
To the balcony–
Didn't put on fragrance today. Dust on her glass cologne drawer, alone on the left wall.
Curtains tied with metal pins, winds instead desperately onto loosening her hair bun. Drying the face.

Balcony clean like a paediatrician's office– the opposite shade of what the sun makes of it.
Two-mouthed stove, flame turns on extra high.
A white marble kettle on top.

2 cups of water.
4 full pinches of pure green leaves, from Assam.
2 snaps of salt.
An elaborate boil.
Pouring– a thin marble cup.
Half cup goat milk,
1 teaspoon of honey.
Eilachi?

Dips her tongue tip, once- twice.
1 Eilachi.

Someone knocks, soft knocks, Sauhana.
Saniya stands up with her cup in hand.

‘Want tea?’

‘Yes…wait…you added elaichi today.’
‘Hmmm……’
‘Andd..Iram Badi Ammi calling you.’

'It's warm right now, done with it. And clean the dishes later.’
‘Okayy.’
‘Why is she calling me?’
‘No idea.’

FAROOK LASKER

III.II

Solid work of fine art, intricate inscriptions– her gold bangle.
Fine Arabic beneath the index.
Teh-reem. Far-ook.
A heart in the middle.

Sharp golden glare, pointed afternoon shine.
Ochers yellower in the reflection- dark circles lighter, lashes as if tailor's thread.

The bangle slips– empty palm – distancing her steps.

Sheet rustle, hip snaps like a soggy branch.
The frame, carried by the wall through the years.
Sixteen years.

Wide smiles, especially on her, not shy here, showing her teeth–
white gown, fine lace, fine face– smooth stretched lips, that smile– was a chuckle.

The hand became hers.

Blue coat, red pocket rose, her choices, "Ultramarine would look better."
It did.
Glowing the face. "I'll eat your dimples." She said.
She did.
Little him– holding our hands– smiling like his mother. No more "Mr Boyfriend." Now "Dad."
Smiling with his eyes, those wrinkles around his black baby eyes, drenched in the moment, didn't wear the new suit. In the second birthday suit, such a tailor, his mother always knew her way through threads. Added lace to her gown, own white thread.

Bandaged knuckles, the same white thread underneath– brushed and bled when her fingers were tailoring the skin.
Yet, stretched her palms on the day, together in a tight hold.

Ammi with a wide grin, peeking at the hands her son chose, the hands that inherited her bangle, smiled and added the inscriptions– our name.

Pouring droplets, detergent, ash and aloe vera, washing utensils.

Tip-tip-tip hitting the titles.

Chronically mumbled the clock.

Sheet accumulated like uneven soil behind the back.
No patches of any sort of shade, everything smooth– white.
Not even an empty web.
But–
the fan; tar– black flaky wet dust clings to all its four steel wings, such a specific stench, left out, vague...

Ughhhh..it's rotten. Everything vile!
That smell! That same smell! The same vacancy in the room...How?
‘Aughh!!’
‘Ughhhh!!!’

'Farook!'

Head brushes off the window frame, clinging out, stomach pressing on the rock bottom. 'Ughhhh!'
'Ughhh.'
'What happened, Farook!?' Her wet palms rubbing on the back.

‘UGHHHHHHH!’
Sat in the nose, the vacancy.

Slipping feet, sprinting to the bathroom.

SANIYA LASKER

III.III

Saniya fills her lungs, concise steps– kitchen floor.
Nehruma and Sahina on floor.
Sahina flattening the small balls of dough, her mother making out of a big tub full of fermented flour dough– collecting on a big copper tray.
Standing before the counter, Iram's hands deep in a tub full of potatoes.

'Oh, you're right on time,' says Iram. Hands shaken, slid the tub in the middle.

Saniya's finger ventures down, her drawer– firms the grip on the white wood– breathing in air, the waves of her Damascus knife.
Water brownish-red, smell of monsoon, still dirt on them, need a second rinse.

'It'll be better if we make a chulah in the backyard,' says Nehruma.
'Right.' Clay like, slipping.
'How the girls holding up?' asks Nehruma.
Iram peeks a little.
'They're doing alright.'
'And fuffi, you?'

'I'm fine, Sahina.'

Her payal chimes before footsteps.
'You called me, Baji?' says Najiya.
'You BATHED?? In that rose cologne?'
Najiya chuckles frownfully. 'No, no, Sahina, he broke the bottle on bed and-'

‘Najiya, can you go in the backyard and make a chulah?’ utters Nehruma.
Peel sliding off smoothly like land.
‘Baji I…don't know how to.’
‘What do you know then?’ says Iram.
‘Sahina, go with her’
‘Busy.’ Loud the Belan on the wooden ulsa.

‘Find Sauhana and get it done.’

‘Hmm..’ Her heavy payal echoes out.

SALMAN LASKER

III.IV

Ring going, in silver-cave's lengthy dashes– the robot’s voice cracks, end beep– again unreachable.

Sweat dripping, drops sitting on dicktip.
In the air like spring sauna; crowd wiping their second chins, Chanel bags.
All showroom windows shut, retard the new manager.
Flies sticking in the air.
Undie glued to the skin.
Balls hanging, sticking on the jeans.

That guy digging fingers into his bald head.

Spinning cell like a fidget spinner in the fingers.

They roaming, peeking through glasses, the glaring gold and shining silvers.

A branch narrow as a large vein, through the main-exit glass door, bouncing its tiny red, heart-shaped leaves.

'Mr Salman???’

The new employee, nerd, pointing the way– two peeps with stretched eyebrows following the lead.

Bald man, coated in gold the heavy wrist jains; its copper been grinding against sweat salts.
Weighing his very hand, the lady, fuming pickeld fish.

‘……..How can I help you?’ Putting on a mask. ‘Hm.. And. Can you remain at a hand’s distance– please.’

Eyes wander down, pointing at the luxury pieces.
‘I can't beginnn to imagine how’ll this sound on my feet, Babe.’ says the lady.
Husband follows up, twenty-five karat gold payal with two inch long ghungroos.
A heavy piece.
‘How much is this?? This gold one for ankle?’

Unreachable– Farook’s not picking up.
Finger snaps. ‘O, hello??’
Whites of his eyes rotten milk, red and blue veins swimming freestyle.
‘How much??’

‘Sir, that’s our sales guy.’ Pointing to a blue cap. ‘Get to him. Explore as much as you like, once you're locked with a piece, I'll give you the prizing details. Ok.’
‘No.’ With a smirk. ‘We locked on this already, aren't we, babe?’
Lady leeches onto him. ‘Yes! Babe.’

‘Pramod!!’
Pramod jogs in the employee-only lane.
‘Make these….leave soon, and without stealing.’
He nods.

Taking the phone back in the hand, shoulders sit broad, inexcusable.
Making their own way.
‘Heyy.. I gotta go, something personal came.’ Shuts the boss’s office door.

Beast resting in the banyan’s shade.

Black leather seat, foam cushion, pushes down.
Dialing, phone sandwich between the ear and shoulder. Thrust races high on the road.

Slow traffic– tapping the keys, Sahina’s number.

‘Yes, Bhai?’
‘Chacha’s there? At home….’
‘I don't know.’
‘Let me know if he is.’

Neck straightens, the cell sits in the inner pocket of the leather jacket.
Off road, flying the Beast.

‘FOR GOD’S SAKE…pick the phone for once.’

Stopping at once, at the yard gate.
Gate drifting out. ‘It’s on silent.’

Wet Farook’s moustache.
‘I won't' let you drive.’
‘Fair.’ On the backseat. ‘What Prashad said?’
‘Hold tight.’ Roars the Beast as the key turns. ‘He sounds one devious bastard.’
‘He is.’

Monsoon shade hasn't left the blocks, the cold shadows, the peeling paint like cicada’s skin.

Upon each turn, more fragile, some turns, tiny gravels.
Tapes on windows, trees consuming through cement squares.

Road losing its grip around both sides.

Tiers jump to highway, fists rolling up the speed, hair runs off the nose bridge.

Ahead of the all-black zebra crossing, the crumbling brick curb.

“SECTER SURVEILLANCE DEPARTMENT.” Big red words on a metal board.

Cars parked a mansion away, in the open ground.
Beast pauses at the starting bones of the stairs.
Two guards walking down, fat bellies and empty hands, floppin' away.
‘We need our goal done.’ Farook flattens his hair.

Uneven stairs, few folding legs in a lunge, others as tall as an Ebony cigarette.
Guards sitting, lively, in loose uniforms, one in just an underwear, faces lit in the dawn of the entrance; the narrow metal bench bending in the middle.

Smells like poorly cleaned piss and cheap bleach.

Far less salt on that one sitting on the chair. Swallowed in the shadows, before a cement wall that's smelling like wet soil. Unlike others: badges and stars on his shoulders, the policy, olive cap with black outline on, sleeves crossed, but lean arms, not buff.

Eyes down, finger tapping on a paperback.
Farook utters a fake cough.
'Mr Lasker!!’ Officer scoots the chair back, fists on the desk. Common old wood, reeking in aged book scent.

‘You know, I don't mind…I was waiting.’ Pointing at the chairs.

‘Sorry, Prashad…I've been itchy,' says Farook.

RAJ VIKRAM PRASHAD.” The nameplate, tilted to the left, dusty, a couple of fingerprints.

‘Go on, Prashad,’ says Farook.
‘Yea..’ Clears his throat. ‘Team has investigated the area, hm, on the very day and, and since then. As you described, the blood puddle was there, with his ripped clo-’
‘Results??’
‘Hm…we have bad news….’
Farook’s forehead pinches.

‘We have no means to collect fingerprints, and among all, the semen samples.’
‘I!…..’ Farook inhales. ‘I let you know on the very day! On twenty-second!…It's…’
His eyes glare at the corner.
‘Its twenty-forth…today's Twentyfour.'
‘Three fucking days…’ Hammers his fist. ‘The point is!……I gave you the respect you so desperately needed. Gave you my son’s case, YETT!!!!’
‘Easy.’ His shoulder cracks.

‘Every evidence WAS there….yet!..It's been.. three days. Do you think the semen’s thriving there now?? Stupidfuck…’

‘Mr. Lasker I’m…’ Officer’s Adam's apple drags down. ‘I'm on the same page as you're…I'm angry. But please listen-’
‘DO YOUR JOB, PRASHAD.’ Marching out.
Still noiseless Farook’s steps.

Cap tilts back with the neck, Officer sinking in his seat. Scratching back of the neck. ‘Sir..’ Someone in uniform, young but white moustache– whispering in his ear.

‘Hm…joyish work.’ Waves him off. ‘ ……Good you stayed.’

Fingers joint on the desk. ‘Your brother's clothes arrived at the city labs, they'll begin searching for samples.’

‘What about CCTVS?’
‘None, around the area, just a few broken ones… Except for the…Shri Charan’s bungalow… He gulps. ‘Which is you know..’
‘Any footage?’
‘No…’
‘WHATT.’ Fingers cave at the desk. ‘
Well..I don't need to explain to you…if I touch his property without his presence, he'll burn my pubes!’

‘Oh..you shave.’ Eyes shrink. Biting lips. ‘See, Officer, Charan is an intelligent man, he'll know, he'll grasp! Like you should.’ The chair scoots back. ‘Do everything in your reach.. I want the faggots who are responsible.'

Stepping out. ‘Tell these fatties to do their fucking job.'

Bleh chimes in sparks the metal lighter. Slow steps to the office door, white cigarette, yellow bud in the mouth.
Fancy bike, flying away, Salman Lasker.

‘Sir, have you heard that story of Ibrahim Lasker?’

‘Only a million fucking times.' Smoke leaks through the nose.

‘Dogs!’ The cigarette flunks out, crashes on the bottom fourth stair.

‘And for God's sake! You lazy pigs! DO THE SURVEILLANCE WITH A SWEAT!’

FAROOK LASKER

III.V

Thud
Door shut behind the back.

Billowing black curtains; like billowed Gauri's dupattas, always close to rope lengths.

Fading notes of that wet dust or tar in chunks across the rug, to the back of the door.
Galloped whiteness, single shade, except the tiny hole caving darkness– no trace even of the fan's wires.

Spits out– fresh air sprinting in.
In sync the far waving forest's leaves.
Lungs filling in, vomit notes crawling off the nose and whiskers.

Window panels vibrating against the wind.
But– underneath it– a soft sound.
Ears out, forehead softens.

Droplets bursting their heads onto ceramic.

Few grateful ones, falling on something soft– soft and peculiar.

Nosetip at air heights. Her shampoo. The foamy, natural stuff.

Steps forward in pursuit of the muzzle preaching to her skin.

Knock, knock, knock.

Sealed steam.

Silver handle chiming up-down.
Repeated taps, pointy finger joint.

‘I’m bathing, Farook.’
‘Let me in.’ Cloths slip out of the elbow corners, roll in a ball, hattrick in the empty basket.

Same syllabus floating over the steam.
Door, wood, rudely un-see-through.
‘Pls..’
‘Noo.’
‘Pleaseeeeee’

‘Uff.’

Wet clicks, retrieving the ratchet latch–

Steam rushing through, molding-folding, around her, over her like a white curtain.
Poorly–
Pupils dilate, and drool, lips stuttering wide open.

Her skin’s the perfect shade.

Fingers statue on the handle.
White compliments her shade so much, as Cupid’s bow with arrow– her hands on the doorframe, bums of heart.
‘You coming in?’
‘……Hm…’
Eyes roll, soft neck tilt– soapy palm claws at the shoulder– just one pull, and steps skip without a wet floor.
Wrist in her command, taking it beyond the cloud.

Cold air, goosebumps on the left shoulder, the damn window.
Shrinking the foam in the air. Blooming skin covered in yellow highlights. Oh, Star, like a night star.

Warm drips, dissolving, drifting the flaky foam.
Warm, her skin– heartbeat beneath the fingers, in her belly.
Purs, as fingers move to her blue birth mark, ever ticklish her belly.

Geezer valves twitch, Ebony cigarettes, these tall arms.
Drizzle.
Drops done draining her scent, salts down her arms.
Tea on tastebuds, as her shades, the very flash.

Looping curls in fingers, at her back the foamy strands.
Toes erect– shifts the weight.
Grinding teeth, chewy, ear– softer than any lip.
‘May I?’ Calves extend.
Head to her head; her scalp crowned in foam, ocean.
Tcch! Cupid’s arrow, the long fingers– stone her palms, skin caves in, puddle.
Snaily, climbing up the thigh, tickly fingertips.
Camp on the abdomen's creases, sharp without nails, glossy long fingers.

Sailing cruise, the palms. Foam waves dipping around black tides.
‘Just the same…fountain of youth?'
'Same?'
Tsk-tsk. ‘Preetier…’
‘Just like you.' Pushes back, contour collision, the blood bends, and the heart's pumping overtime.
Toes wipe off the ceramic, in the air.
Eyes shut,
grey water.
SPLATTERS.

Tall as Adam. ‘Jus’ like me…. Then..where's fountain of youth?’
Knees bent. ‘I won't tell you.’
A jolt–
her hair, whip of shards.
Crushing the feet.
Ten fingers, chest turn clay, lungs empty.
But, kinda red her eyes from each corner.

Tongue slips out.
Bridge going to her ears. Raw rose, the hair.
Soakin' wet.
On what expedition, sparky as if close to something special, unshaken.
Olive eyes.

Unescapable greens.
Xanax eyelids: past few late nights.
Tearful.
Tons compressed on her eyelines.

Fat drops, face tilts, eyes closer and closer.

Swollen soft cracks of her lips, glitter, damn clingy water.
Soft as rose petals.

Soggy, nails failing to nick a flake.
Hinges her shoulders. 'Take a breath.'
Heavy, all the weight.
Dusky the upper chest.

Sticking her fingers in hair knots; scratching oils off.
'Am I the only one who's keeping things to themselves?' Voice just as scratchy.

'Probably not.'
Strands like cotton threads, unmix and unload, stiffed zigzag from the knot.
'Probablyyy not.' Gold suits her ear.

Flash streamed like back molded by a river. The smooth drifts.
Close, closer, chests calming each other, college nights.
Smears over hair like a web.
'I love how warm you're, Farook.' Dragging lips on forehead, on the soul.

Chest flooded, warm trail.
Fingers orbiting on the love bite.

Fingers knot on the arm scarf, on her lower back, like how she locks each cell closer.
‘You make me regret this, more and more and more. But. Want to make me do it again. And again. And again.’
Siren.
Foam and flesh shift down to the neck, her arms, her face.
Oh, her face.

Teeth gliding down the cheek– on the love bite, pressing canines, deeper as on her neck, playdoh her skin when she doesn't pay attention.

‘OAhh.’ Pierced canines.
Copycat reopened the love bite.
Copper mixin’ in the air.
Lips on it, bandage.

Tub filled, lukewarm fresh water.
In the crossed arms.

‘Remember what I used to say when you-’ Continue climbing her fingers.
‘How can I forget.’
‘Mhmm..Now… you don't wake me… up upon nightmares.’
Turns, hair blankets the eyes. ‘Hmm!?’
As growls in her sleep, sounding nights.

Firming the friction. Tons, but light as flower, her hip. ‘I don't see them now.’

A warmer drop hits the shoulder.
Salt.
‘I miss him, Farook……I miss him so much.’
‘No..no, no.’ Tightens arm scarf.
‘I miss…I, I, I…miss him.’
Similar syllabus, relentless bumps of her heart.
‘No, no, no..SUSHHH.’
‘Don’t let me go…don't..don't..’ Tears, hiccups. ‘…Hold me closer.’

III.VI

SAUHANA LASKER

‘This seems right…right?
Slaps, palm full of wet red soil, onto the bricks.

In the sharp sunless luminous, stains on the border of Najiya’s kurti, swings arms, giving further shape.
Out of the thin shadow of the neem tree. Leaves and yellow beads beneath the feet, a tinge in the air, nose used to.
‘Seems..right.’
Half lengths, covered her arms, red like cherry.
Like a half-circle, a cut dome or a half-eaten donut.
Calm pet of clay, like the ones on a baby’s back. ‘Done.’ *Ugh*
‘Good job, Choti Mumani..’

Artificial dew, tipped off the bottle, on her back, old polite backless suit.
‘Would you mind??’ Cups the palm together.
‘Of course not.’ Down the last sip– cold lemon-induced water.
Gritty rubs, melting, drops, concentrated red, a thin trail.
‘Hm..’ Hands jittering–
‘Left few drops…’
Clay remains in the outlines of her nails; neck tilts, gulp.

Empty and green, path, a fairy’s trap.

On some urban mischief the clouds.

Saniya– quick steps – brass tray thrice her width.
‘Ammi..brace your stepss..’
Flexed arms, veins on the skin.

‘Let me ..’ Filled with flour-ish, something, flooding out a golden fabric that's covering it – a ton atleast. *Eshh*
Soil turns into sand, sandals numb beneath the feet.
The brass edge slips on the fingers.
‘Careful, Sauhana…' Inhales Saniya.
Fingers sticking like marshmallow– chopped friction, wide arms–
Steady steps.
Leading the way to Najiya’s craft.
Close! So close the chulah.
‘Few…more steps.’ Saniya growls, weight sinkin' on her side with each lengthy knee skip.
‘Esh..’
Tearing threads of what brothers called– tricep.
‘Slowly.’
Bracefully! Lands the tray on the grass.

‘Hushhh..Allah..’ Palms filled with rushing blood, heat of summer.
‘May…I..I.. have your..’ Soft wool, her cardigan.
Long inhales. ‘Cold?’
Neck shivers.
Her fingers move to the knots, unwinding white ribbon like ropes.
The warm cardigan, smells vanilla, her.
Hands rush, fill it up, warm as a blanket.
Finally breathing the spine– murmurs drown the rustling winds.
‘What is this?? ’
Seems sound the shape.
Najiya gulps down spit. Coughs.
‘So close to the wall…. all the smoke will paint it black.’ Poker-faced her vowels, disappointed?
‘I told you to assist her??’ adds Saniya.
‘Baji…it's not her fault.’ Fingers screech on the glass bottle.
‘Silence…’

‘Go. Inside, help others to bring the ingredients out.’
‘Okk, Baji..’
Quick steps, heavy ghungroos on the anklet.

‘This you guys build??’ Crumbles in one punch, wet chunks.

‘Form a triangle like this.'

‘She wanted to make it look good, Ammi.'
‘Things like this..Achhu!!....Just have to..functional, Sauhana.’

‘Hmm.'
‘Tell them to come out, I'm starting with the cooking.’
‘Mm…’

SAUHANA LASKER

III.VII

Today's ghost.
Awful unanswered knocks!
KNOCK! KNOCK! KNOCK–
Screaming fists– brushes off.

Shaking head, moves past Obsidian's door.
Up onto the stairs– deep in the third floor’s corridor.
Arms charge to swing on Ivory's door– whispers– floating in the air; the drawing room.

‘Uuuhh…..’ Ispara rubbing her fingers, like a brush on canvas. Smoke gets in her eyes.
Space mushes, snuggle in between sisters. Behaving like bed, the sofa.
‘Are you ok?’ Pets on the back.
‘Shut up..’ Ivory sniffles, wiping the nose, long sleeve with minimal black stripes, clinging sweat of three days, yet vanilla.
‘Letmeee.’ Cardigan stretches, soaking tears from sharp eyes, lingering half opened eyelids.
‘Enoghhh.’
Duck tape on the knuckles, cold, mehroon skin.
‘Easy!..’ Hisses.
Frown the knuckles.

‘What you guys were talking about….?
Nose folds in wrinkles. ‘Wait..’ As if dairy. ‘You guys smell that-’
‘Tehreem’s pregnant… she's lactating…’ Sahina scoops a breath.
Ispara flinches.
'Wait…what??' Face flame, steady and dry. Tehreem’s eyes fixed on Haroofs, palms firm on the Para.

‘Mumani??’
Sight lowers, page turns.

‘I should..mm..throw this shit off…’
Cigarette off her lips.
‘Yes!!’
‘You should,’ says Sahina.

Lips crumbly moving in sync with the eyes, shining face, hair covered in veil.

A chunky inhale, tapping cigarette, scorching ash on her thumbnail; she flicks it off.
‘Wohhhh.’ *Cough* ‘I mean.. it's a good news..Yea..YES! Good news.’
‘Why?…’ Smacks her lips, fingers gliding, lily oil on obsidian hair.
‘Yea..no, but…like..’ Ivory wiping her nail, off the fingers.
‘Huh!?’ Ivory looking to the window. ‘What you mean??’
‘It's odd..’ Ispara shrugs. ‘No offense.’
‘But….’ Groaning, unfurls long arms, stepping out.
White smoke left in the yellows.

‘Allah.. don't even begin to hear, Mumani.. it's good news. She’s acting strange….’

Another page turns.

‘Strange??’ Gulps. ‘Her brother died..four days ago..’ Her eyes fixed on Tehreem. ‘You’re flowing with joy all of a sudden.’
‘Baji..we are about to welcome a baby..’
‘Shut up!’ Eyes roll. ‘You smell overallly! Earthy.. go take a bath.’

Uhh ‘Take care, Mumani.’

Mumbles of the winds, sandpaper, as sisters’ tongues.

SAHINA LASKER

God created his throne and then a pen; then Tehreem's voice, playing in the background, going far beyond past and present and to trenches.
Otherwise butterflies wouldn't exist– the yellowtails.
In his choir, far and pure, chords tighter than catgut.
Stretching each Haroof backward and forward, heavy as a wind whisper, voice, bouncing off the lips. Selfish and crude, the God, making ponytail, cording her melodic threads.

Olive greens look up– blurs the sight, yet, eyes remain on her– grey silhouette.
Underneath all her scent– the desk, the dried paint.
Under a coat of dust.
Almost noiseless the cotton page, pressing against her fingers, turns.
A breath, cotton page the nose, civilized.
Threads: melodic threads.

The easel at the desk edge, unused.
The oils slightly opened– or loosely closed.
Books– he brought here to read; now desk weight.

That canvas as clean as those curtains, not a layer of paint.
‘Have you considered something…you can't now..can you? Your breasts leaking now like smoke cigarette, birth control..too late?
Eyes glued on the pages, winds responding far better.
'Hmm??'

His pens have forgotten the smell of his palms– along with the room.
Buried his scent. They don't mourn him, letting dust devour the edges.
Open caps, leadless pencils, new and old hardcovers.

Still as if childhood, playing statue. ‘He couldn't save my brother! Your son, Tehreem… He didn't listen to you… he didn't go search.. you willing to trust him with another life?
Threads.

‘Farook was missing a day before… had cigarettes all night, you can't smell that shit..I can! What you do!?… Again, just damn one day, cigarettes..he was in garden instead of going to search for him..’
“He'd be ok..he's my son, doing good wherever he is, some friend's house, maybe.” BULLSHIT! RAT!'

Threads.

‘He could've saved him, Tehreem… that addict ain't! Worth it.’ Stubborn bitch playing statue. ‘He failed you. Broken…whatever you see in him..’

A kiss to the cover, closes the Para– back in the silver attaché.
‘Listen to me…’

Didn't turn left, attaché off place on the glass table.
To the door.

‘He didn't fulfil you!!! The way you ran to me!’
‘Ahh…’
Cold her steps– away.
Fire stamp, cheek burn. All five of her fingers.

Sniffles. Knees shrink to the right, sinking in the chair she had bestowed.
Shining the silver attaché.
Burning– not as much as the bones in the chest; as the blood in the veins. Pouring her husband's smell over her cells.
'Wouldn't hit her husband like this.’

Empty desk.

SAHINA LASKER

III.VIII

Each step hammering down with haste.
Rigid gasps,
yet,
empty the lungs.
Toes dig in for brake at once– lilies and jasmines of the backyard.

A herd of people, ladies– cooking, big pot.
‘Have you seen Farook!?’
‘Pinch your tongue, Child.’ says Nehruma.
'Don't call your chacha by name..’ Tick tongue, some old hag.
Ugh
Spits on the side, bashing shoulders to shoulders, sprints through them.

The yard.
Limestone appears ochre today. Extra noisy.
‘Nehal!’ On a call, roaming slothly.
‘Have.. you..seen….Farook?’
‘He’s at masjid.'
‘How…the fuck.. you know? ’
Phone pulls away from his face. ‘Riyaz said, and he's at masjid himself..by now.’

Hands pushing, down, bending knees.
Breathes–in–out–in–out–in–
‘What are you panicking about now?’
‘Huh?? Rubbish!’ Straightens shoulders.
‘Lungs and nose don't lie.’ Phone back to the ear.

A few steps, ochres, so pale.
Palm piercing in the chest, stumbling breaths.

‘Maybe! Bhai knows something you're after.. he and Chacha had a ride.’

Slaps open the front door– end of the main hall, fingers clamp onto the handrail.
‘Sahina, have you seen Ahad?’ The voice reflectes down the marching shoulders.
Slipping steps– the second floor.

Fists punching down at Salman's door.

‘What..?’
Emerges his giant silhouette, covering the door frame.
Slips underneath his broad shoulders. ‘Where’s Farook?’
‘Calm down..a little.’
Bed sinks.
‘Breath first..’
Blinds, CFLs closed. A dim lamp at the corner of the right eye, emitting dim white light.
Steel bottle.
‘Take it…’ Arm unpause, back, curls around the torso.
'Where's Farook..’
Stomach flooding with water.
Burp Lamp's slim, vine-like, flared glow; bottle sits at its side. ‘Where you two went?’
‘Why??’ Eroding like the lamp’s glow. Bumps the blinds to the sides.
Gone in the darks of the room’s corners, his right half, blocking a panel of the window. ‘You wanna know all that??’
‘Salman…’
Neck cracks. ‘He’s hiding like a rat! Nothin.. about..Aariz… I can't forget the face!… I want…and he's not telling what happened.’
Shadow shifts, burnt browns in the lampshade.
Petting the shoulder. ‘He’s his father, and he's..we all doing something…aren't we?’

‘He’s not doing anything!’ Shrugs, sitting up.
‘My brother died..and you all doing NOTHING.’
‘I promise, I'll bring him justice! Give us time, please, Baji…’
Knees straight off the bed’s cushion.
‘Baji, listen..please-’
Door slams at its wooden frame.

SANIYA LASKER

III.IX

Bhabre flapping their tiny black wings a million times per second,
sucking on the tiny yellow flowers of the tall Arhar plants.
Flying over marigolds, roses, lilies.
‘Can you smoke somewhere else, Ahad?’
‘Huh!’ Pops his muscles from daydream. ‘Hm…yes!….Baji.’
Leaps forward in big steps.

Tsk-Tsk-Tsk. ‘Who’ll help these, smokers…’ Saniya sighs. Watering the plants. ‘Gosh.’ Licks her tongue. Black roses shrunk to buds; petals flared and fell onto the ground.

AHAD LASKER

Through the greens and muddy browns of the backyard.
Lungs pushing through the chest, pressing them down, half-closed fists.
‘ACCHHUUU…..’ The whole body shrivels.
Contracting ribs, elbow against the chest.
Timid tries to have a puff.
Right hand carrying an Ebony cigarette, left holding a lab’s inhaler.
Hurrying steps on limestone. ‘ACHHHUUHH!’ Spine bends, knee fails.

‘Chach..are you ok??’ Petting the back.
A yellow liquid drools down from the nose; Nehal spits on the side.
'I'm…ok…' Fists press against the ochres, shrivels the spine, and stands up.
Leaving.
Squeaks the yard gate.

‘What’s goin’ on with everyone??
Ahad's stumbling outside.

‘Oh nothing, Baby, my uncles are just weird.’ Nehal continues to roam, phone against the lips.

III.X

FAROOK LASKER

Flat switches, a chunk even as stuck at “ON.”
Fan off.
‘Should I shut the window?’
‘No.’ Arms crawl underneath, closing the sheet folds.
‘Hm.’
Snuggling in.
Bends her fingers, sharp pops, except for the index.
‘Custard?’
Hands flare out; a small bowl full of fruit custard levitates off the small pillar like a bed table. Pinky leans back, turns on the lamp, a sunset-like orange light.
‘Here.’ Holding a bowl of fruit yoghurt.

‘Not today.’
Hush Eyes lower down.
Tuck Snaps the index.
Cracking fingers of the other hand.

Bowl levitates, close to her face.
‘Pleasee.’
Exhales slowly.
Sharp, made out of rose thorns, the olive eyes.
Mouths open; they shift at the spoon.
Orange mixing in the green pool.

'It's good.' The spoon lay between her lips, taking the bowl.
‘I don't like the way she yelled at you.’
‘Don't mind her.’ Neck down, fresh the white pillow.
‘And I didn't like your silence, hated it.’ Gulps.

Round belly, warm as a life. ‘What could I say?’
‘Anything??...True. We all in the same pain...’

'It's getting worse...my breathing.’
'It's not a disease, Farook.’
‘Maybe it is.’
'It's more like ghabrahat or bechaini.' Soft slaps.
‘Ouch.’ Awful, the diary smell of the curd. ‘I should see a psychiatrist?’
‘YOU SHOULD TELL ME THE TRUTH.’ Clanks the spoon on the bowl.
Hands out– on her, eyes down, fingers holding up, stretching her suit, plum shades warm in tone.
Warm enough without them.
Fingers on leash, squeezing them.
‘I used to call you, “Gaspy liar” back in the college days...remember?
‘Ahhhh..’
Like rope folds and collides.
‘I used to catch you..’ Cracking. ‘Just like this.
Her head leans back, a few chuckles leave from her nose.‘Still can..’
‘Ahh...’ All soggy.
Her fingers– dry, pressing against her mouth.
Head shaking timidly– sniffling.

‘I don't kn.....how to do this anymore, Farook.’
‘S..sushhh.’ Stretches soggy fingers on her knee.
‘Don't touch me! Get away..’ Falls onto the knees.

Gasps and hiccups. Spine curved.
‘Teh...’
‘AWAYYY!’

III.XI

24 oct, 15

I fucking hate ppl. Especially when they here at my home.. get the fuck away from my face... cryinn here like we owe yoy tears.. echoing living room, sniffing tears.. waht are uour fucking blessings would change?..he's rotting, what he left is degrading.. rusting with each salted drip. May your god put IV in his arm.
He was afraid of needles tho...
And what it would fuckinn bloom.
Fuckinn rustin, Sahina screaming, Tehreem tearing, that fucking leak..of a gasp.. shivered my spine, why you gotta do that?...why we needed to pray in groups... in graves we alone, in hope with a god who never visited.....felt.. idk he's real or not... fuxkin..
Miss you Papa...I, I can't help it.. You left me alone, failed words, failed yourself.
You said I won't be alone, you said “I'll protect you...” but you didn't bandage my hand today... you didn't held em today.. where I come to rot with you?
Your grave isn't too wide.
I can't help but miss you. I placed roses there, on your chest, I know you hated em.
Well if you aren't here to look at my hands, you aren't there to smell lilies.
I can't help but feel...responsible, Papa....
That Aariz died cause of me... it was my fucking walk.. my habit, my need.. he was just...Fuckkk...
“I won't let you hit on a tree, grandma” He said..
It got worse since you left, everything far is blurry, like early stages of your fuckin paintings.
I swear to not have any medication. Fuck pills, fuck you. Idc.
“Look at your hair.” I AIN'T WANNA, FUCKK YOU!.

“Look at the nature.” Well I tried…evening walks…wish I never fucking listened to your words.. I would have never utterd to Aariz and he wasn't a fucking a walker…he would be still alive..
I WAS THERE! WHEN…WHEN he got called a faggot and bullied, I was there when he almost drowned, I was there when Farook almost caught him enable his anal..fuckinng activites..
I was there to save him.. and he was there for me..
But I betrayed him, “I don't wanna fuck off!”
He took my words too seriously…
If I wasn't here, he would still be alive… You would still be a father.. Riza would still have someone?.. probably idk…her bitch mother wanted to marry her somewhere.. kill her if you have some afterlife spirit power.
“Look at your mother.” I can't. Tried, Can't… she reeks of you, that whole room….she reminds me of you, all those whites.. and I guess I remind her of you…
We both don't wanna remember you… and maybe that's why since then…it's never easy to see her in the eyes. It not easy to see mirrors.
Broke few, you aren't here to patch my kunkels… don't be too selfish with your rotting, I will too someday and you won't be here to remember me.. you aren't here.
“Look at yourself.” No. Nononono…..

Should I burn this journal?? I know you'd say, “No..”
Sick fuck.. expression is not poor ppl’s bone.

Part four

SAUHANA LASKER

IV.I

Thin vapours flying up the marble nozzle– eliachi yawns in the air. Down flowing the dark browns. The tilt pauses, backwards, before a spill.

Dark clouds and darting wind.
‘RIGHT AMOUNT OF HONEY??’

‘I have a cold.’ Echoes Saniya’s voice from the bathroom.
‘HUH?’
‘Cold!’

‘I made you a cup.’ Tsk-Tsk– right amount of honey, a little more than a teaspoon. Mother always keeps it under a teaspoon.
Vaguely alive the bashing, mattress or something thick.
‘Why did you throw all the paintings Papa made?’ Lips quiver and folds, flavour. Two elaichi, just as Papa liked it.
‘I can't hear you properly..’ Wet squeaks with her voice.

Tidy bed, white sheet, pillows with same shade lace, grey walls.
Sips hitting the empty walls.
Doesn't like any sound lips make. ‘Ammi, can you hear this?’

Transparent panels up the balcony bounds and door, black by the rain clouds, few patches of gold– stuck yesterday’s sky.

‘Why did you throw all the paintings Papa made?’
Wet squeaks. Wood beating. Mugs pouring, diluting detergent.

‘The smell of oil bothered me too..after..’
‘Don’t ask stupid questions, Sauhana.’

‘But.. Ammi..'

Cozy-smelling the bedsheet, the whites underneath.

‘I don't like looking at myself all the time.’ Sniffs.
‘Tissues?’
‘I’M not crying!’
‘No!...no, the cold.. your nose must've be red and leaky?...We get the same kind of cold..afterall’
‘Enjoy your tea, Sauhana. I’m alright.’

‘Hm…’ Maybe too sugary, sticking to the tongue. Fingers mapping the thin handle, curved like a spine.
Yellow leaks– smudging blacks off the eyes.

‘That’s the opposite of what papa wanted.’ A drop slips through the teeth gap– spreading into the whites.
Rub! Rub! Rub– the burnt browns of the tea only thrive.
Rub, rub, rub, with spit’s moisture– fading in macros.
Hush

Leaks in forms of cracks, huge & growing, arteries.
Winds flip off all the strands from the forehead.
Tilts the cup to extremes, spilling away the brown stain making liquid from the balcony edge.

Metal brush with nylon hair, scratching Ispara's jeans.
‘He wanted you to, see you..appreciate yourself…giving you don't like mirrors that much.’ Trailing detergent foam, natural ash and lime.
Her hand bends back and holds the cup.

Soaking wet the floor. Cold too, similar to the ceramic wall.
Splash high, the drops, lands on her back.
‘Why you sit here??’
Slightly red the shadows of her eyes, too oval to count the corners.
‘No clue..’
‘Weird my every offspring.' Drowning the jeans in the bucket.

Thin as watercolors the ceiling.
‘Why don't you??’
‘I am not sweet towards an awful amounts of things..’ The foam splatters; beating the denim shirt with the washing bat.

‘Ammi, I don't like how distant she is.’
‘Everyone grieves…differently, Sauhana.’ Tight squeeze, dripping the foam. Then to the bucket, water splashes.
Two trails of strands free from her bun, right shoulder pushing back and forth, bashing the black denim.

‘Crying?’
‘Idiot.. there's a million salty things here.’

Rinsing, bucket with the fresh water.

‘Sorry….but..and.. I know your tears…don't dilute my.. knowing..’
‘I’m not….’ Her shoulder still, denim’s drowning.
‘It's sad, that your father died.’ Splashes, stops or noiseless.
‘I'm.. sad….I’m…but, why you keep.. fucking…repeating your words??’

Ash and lemon in the vacuum. Except, occasional drips, bits of foam.

‘Sorry..’
‘Don’t be..’ The shirt dunks in the basket. ‘I’m sorry..

‘Don’t be..’

Ispara’s oversized white shirt, dirt, blood, sweat, sharp as hers. ‘She's not ok, Ammi.’
‘Give her..her time.’ Detergent pours through her fingers, getting wet.
‘Go. Look for more dishes to be clean.’

Shreeks the wet jeans, with the steps.
Smudging bedroom’s whiteness on the bathroom bounds.
‘AND I DIDN'T THROW EM... THEY'RE IN THE WARDROBE.’
Voice sharp, similar to the copper of her blood.

IV.II

SAUHANA LASKER

Kettel on the stove, two plates, and mother's cup on the balcony's bounds.

'Wait?...' Flat on the greens.
That white shirt with golden embroidery.
'AMMII!..MAMUU! AT THE BACKYARD.....NOT MOVING!! '
'What??'
Dishes drop.
Sprinting out, passing the corridor, to the stairs.
Watch your steppss
Hurried mumbling of mother. 'The goddamn rub is slippery, careful, Sauhana...'

'CHACHA! UNCONSCIOUS!'
'What???' Nehal pauses.

Jumps off the second-last stair, skippin' main hall.
Turn ceramic, cement, limestone– grass beneath the feet.

'MAMU!!!'
Face down, pressing on the grass.
'He's-not-moving!'
Fists slam on the chest.
He groans.

'Mamu!?'

‘..Farook..’
Grass bends as his fingers crawl.
Chest bends in, air's crawlin'.
Raspy lashes.
Flickering.
FISTS SLAM ON THE CHEST.
‘Stoppp….mMHh.’ He groans.
‘What happened?’ asks Saniya. ‘Are you ok?'
‘Mm.’
‘Mamuu! You're cruel!! Rushing away, deep in the backyard.

SANIYA LASKER

‘You make a hobby out of scaring her.’
DRENCHED in the green smell of grass. Wet, shabnam still clings to the lashes.
Flickers, as they open.
‘Change your clothes, Sauhana.. You'll catch cold!’
Disappeared in the garden.
'Have you slept here?’
‘Hmm……’ Lips flicker.
‘Stop stroking his neck like that.’ Drunk collar, three buttons off. Sinking collarbones, burrows. ‘No fever.’
‘What happened, Farook??’
‘Hm..’ An ant walking down to his left brow. ‘I was walking…maybe a wave.. sleep…’ Spitting out.
Smears the shabnam, ant floods away. ‘Get up.. Go inside.’ Holding the hand up to his face.

‘Chill..Baji..’

‘Quite being a child, Farook.’
Saniya goes after Sauhana.
***

Farook clears his throat.
‘What really happened?’ Nehal stands up.
‘Nothing…’
‘Really?’
Nods his eyelids.
‘Ok…Do you need something?’
Same nod. Rubbing them.
‘Not even a towel?’
‘Hm…’ His brows rise.

IV.III

NAJIYA LASKER

‘Shak! Shak! Shak!... You're... insufferable!’ Spit drops bounce in the air.
FINALLY, mouth opens.
‘AND YOURE FUCKING A WHORE!’
‘ACHHUUU!’ Neck swings down, left and right, arms flaring for the tissues. ‘Fuckkk.’
‘Dye, Dog.’
‘Najiyaa...Please.’
‘What please, Huh!..like I didn’t see your phone. Avoiding me! To talk to thattt! Bitchh!’
Sinks the moth mattress as curves the back, hands wrap around the pillow. ‘DIE! DIE! DIE!’
‘Listen to me.....’ It sinks more.
‘AACHHHUU.’ Forward, folds, as if hit by a wave, hands surf to the sheet.
‘Don’t you dare dirty my bedsheet.’ Snatches off his hands.
‘...Fuck you.’ Face mushes into the pillow.
‘FUCKK YOU! ’

Bitche's contact got that golden star.
Unsaved but "Favourite."
Golden like these marriage frames. Always silent on the phone. Bitches in the android body. Void advantages of the real gold frames. All the frames, smiles of the face.

Mattress lifting up. Ahad shifted a few inches, licking the edge.

Two steps away, snuggling in the bedsheet.
Translucent veil: one knee over the other, tall tent and phone’s brightness on max, oval eyes stuck on the screen. Yellowness of that golden star "Fav." Fingers typing words.
‘You’re killing me!!’ Pillows land, denting the sunny tent.

Glaring the bright screen, a chat, pink custom background. Letters stuck in motion blur. His thick arms.
‘IS IT THE BITCH…you talking tooo!?’

Lips go down like the other nights, frowning cat.
Sniffles purrs.
‘Talk to me–’
Turns, arm jolts, pink distorts to pixels; bounces off the thick black grits of the styrofoam.
Drops down.
‘I told you, she's no one, I didn't! Fuck her!..Ever.. just talked once or twice.’
Eyes drooling. Crocodile learns nothing, every night shit, the wetness.
Jolts,and distorts his skinny body, wiping drool off the nose. '...Najiya, please…’
'Don't fucking preach to me…’

‘Plss..don't show me your back.’
The sheet continues to rustle. In the fists, whites fill the finger gaps.
‘Please, Najiya…'
Breaths carving up the nose, chisels in hand.

Photographs exceeding the frame's bounds, bottoms hanging low.
Brown and warm with fake oyster dust, old home frames–
small frames.
Suits with the black walls, the zigzag patterns and front straight smiles.

Sniffs, dry cough, became canyons, the nose, jam as shit.

Eliyaz holding hands with Bhaijan, in shiny white kurta, Eid 2012–
Smiling through his eyes, those dimples–
To his chest, was growing tall.
Would be tall.
Holding the feet of the smiling little Siffan.

‘Najiya..’ Fingers reaching to the chest.
‘Whattt.’ Thrashes long nails onto the gripping folds.
Pushing on the shoulders.
Still.
Stupid ochre eyes, staring like a victim.
Flowing tears, a motionless trail, one and two slip down to his cheeks.
‘Why don't…you listen to.. me???’ His wet hiccups. Fingers reaching for the piercing nails.
‘Just….shut up.’ The tears snort back. ‘Wipe your crocodilish tears.’

‘ITS NOTHINNNNN-’
'Liar!'

‘Imnot!!’ Hands mimicking the vowels on the back. Neck turns.
‘Achhuu!’
‘Wipe that thing…’
‘It's dry..’ Chuckles. Nose returns, sniffing hair, likes the strands with jasmine oil. Loud sniffs, those long nights.
‘Ilma told me everything.. You dogs suffer when you panic..you definitely panicking about something… Are you not?’
More chuckles. Teeth on the ear. ‘Who…what?’
‘The pigeon lady..’ Such dark reds his browns when lense macroscopic.
‘That bitch is retarded.'
‘Ohhhh…everyone’s except youu.’ Dragging nails on his neck. Thrashes at once, butter knife on tomato.
‘LIARR!’
Ugh Sinkin' the moth mattress as water, drowning bones.
Few inches away, fingers curl like a patch on the neck. ‘What the fuck you want from me!?
Off the bad, bends for phone, of course, the phone– Thud! Screams the door. Strength for the hoes & dead things. No leaving behind the bitch.

1PM, morning shifted.
Ahad hasn't come back.
No knocks or wet steps.
Still as fuck door.
Neck shifts with the right hand, groaning crack– cold keypad.

Ring..Ring.....Ring.... Beep. Beep.
Dials again.
Ring....Ring.....Ring.... Beep. Beep.

Ring.....Ring.....Ring.... Beep. Beep.
‘Fuckk..’

Ring.....Ring.....Ring...
‘.....Hel-’
‘WHO THE FUCK IS THAT WHORE!!!! You Dog! My brother will kill you.. if you don't come clean to me..RIGHTTFUCKINHGNOW-’
Beep– Beep–

Screen void. Gold, earrings and nose ring aren't shining in the black reflection.

Got gold star that bitch.
Shifts the shoulder.
Jolts the phone to the wall, flunks out the battery, on the clean spot, hits the narrow slit between the soundproofing.
Crumbing noise of metal pieces.
‘No! PHOTOS OF ELIYAZ!!’

IV.IV

END OF CORRIDOR, SECOND FLOOR / IRAMLASKER

The bitter cotton candies brisk walking to the horizon; the yellow shine filling the eyes.
Scoots the chair back, the clunchy fingers,
legs up to the comfort metal, railing as if half-open eyelid at the end of the second corridor.

‘Such clouds Allah has bloomed today, Beta.’
‘Hmm… here too, might rain– Now she has found a new way of torturing me!’
‘Reeallly? Pushes cell deep in her ear.
‘Asking every single day, “How much you earned today, Beta?”
‘Behhh…no shame on that wrinkly cunt.’
‘And you know how much of a saint Niyaz be..’
‘Yeahh’ Scratching oily head. Thick, rested oil, crowd of skin cells– black border edge on the nails.

‘He tells her and she wails..oh how miserable I’M! How much I tortured her. Then begs.’
‘Shameless!’ Killing itch of the crotch; flakes listening on the suit.

‘At first I didn't interrupt, she is his mother. He has to care..but daily begging for money?…she even gets jealous when he pay the kids in the morning instead of her..’
‘She’ll burn in hell!’ No one on the stairs, empty corridor. ‘Who’s making those noises?’
‘Neymat playing, those dolls Salman gifted her.’
‘Ohh.’

‘How’s Farook Chacha now?’

‘Ohh..You know how he is…Remember how overly reacted when Gauri died?’
‘Yea….Allah..Gauri Bua..’
‘This morning, they found him in the backyard. All wet, slept there instead of in his room.’
‘Whyy?’
‘Who knows, Beta, only Allah knows. And you know?’
‘What!?’
‘Yesterday Sahina screamed at him about Aariz…yelling that he lied about his death, something else happened.’
‘ALLAHH! THEN?’
‘He remained silent, as usual, only told her to go away.’
‘Then?’
‘She got even angrier and called him names..’
‘ALLAHHHH.’
‘Nehruma grunted, took her in her room and locked it.'
‘Then?’
‘Nehruma punishing her…’
‘Allah have some mercy on my sister… why you didn't do anything?..free her.’
‘Shut up, Rano…I don't want to involve in this…these insolents can't even behave upon death.’
‘Hmmm…. Khuda Hafiz, I need to call Sahina.’
The phone beeps.

Sky's gazing back.
The cotton candies back at the lengths of the scalp.
Killed every ounce of brightness.

IV.V

SAHINA LASKER

The charcoal-filled eyes staring at her, at the light.

Before the closed window, the brightest corner in the pit of compressed ocean; pages turning.

Pupils on the curves of his thin cursive.
Page frowns as it turns; forehead shrinks to waves, a different entry.
20 Oct 14
Nails fold a nudge on its upper corner near the date. Rapidos the numbers, almost gibberish.
Shuts the diary.
Nose runs back,
sniffles, itching book dust.
A wipe, rich black, beneath the thin dust.
Back to the dusty desk.

His bed, empty.
The wall, all, one stroke, detailless.
Taps on the light switches– dimensions flat, splashes thick mustard everywhere.
But the darks–
Steady in the frame, looking down–
Smiling.

Sight slippery, rolling off, index stuck, grounding weight, arm flares to the left, charcoal on fingertip.
Steps lean, finger keeps poking.

Stubborn the squeaky latch, rusting the nose.
To the right! ‘Eyahh…’

Lashes! Thud! To its bounds. ‘Ahh!..’
Snatching the hand away. Stretches and breaks a nudge. Red and rust.
Nudge of the brown skin hammered into clamped metal folds.
‘fuccck you! ’
Quivering steps slam the door.

Far empty stairs.
Dupatta wraps between the rust licked space of the thumb. Spits the tongue down the staircase way.
Scampering up the corridor–
Knock, knock, knock on Ispara’s door.

Finger joints rasp, fall the shaking knuckles.
Sight gasping, face down, fists pressing on the chest. Rushing towards the stairs.

IV.VI

TEHREEM LASKER

The ceiling is no longer white. The new colour, much darker in the perpetual shadow.

Eyelids lie dead– pupils settled low; thin slit of vision.

Smooth shade, a fill-up, no flakes– no patches.

Back bends, cat pose, bones cracking.

Nosetip, lips touching, Farook's pillow.
Arms to the edges, white sheet bending beneath–
loose fist; a punctured boat on the willow sea.

Fourteen years, the same frame, coffee brown, the plain edges.
Giant wall holding two tiny blocks.
Motionless photoframe, the locked door.
Empty.

His smile, the same as it was five days ago, only wider, that milk tooth.

Fingers push the weight off the bed, a hairband, the frenzies in a hoop.

Smile wider from the side, empty, was enough this one frame. All the time he sat closer than the frame. The big smile.
Small in the frame, teeth fireflies from the bed.

Same as inside: mostly shadows, spilling winds, charcoal spill.

Ponytail hanging down the veil on the trail.
Wide empty stairs. Red rug brown.

Feet startle– Sahina at the heights, settled onto the second-last step.
Still like a gecko, the gifted green silk suit, the tiny spark burn on the right sleeve.
Shaky fingers getting close– clenched fists– stretched arms on the lap.
Steady steps.

Her head leans back, sight at the tall roof– nose wiggles an inch & back.

Lunge to the last step.

A turn– breathing corridor enclosed, a dark curtain of clouds.

Pacing steps– third staircase.

Knob shiniest of the way, cold.
Loud engravings he made himself.
“KNOCK. KNOCK. KNOCK.”
Dust and a few tiny balls of web.
CHeK

Yellownes.
All four CFLs…

Tap-tap-tap, the dim one remains– static, like the sky, dull sky.
Window grey.

Dark background, even darker his clothes, darkest his hair–
flowen, now staying in the mid air–
A grin is almost a smile.
Eyelids, fallen curtains, hiding the edges of his black pupils.
At the corner, his initials, "A.L”

Bed messy as the mornings; each morning– his red pillow on the verge of falling, sheet curled up, another one hanging on four of its edges.

Teeth hidden behind those lips, almost a smile.

Closed window, black metal frame, tall wide panels, black and white.
Hasty wind.
Filling, slicing ear tips.
Rustling of the sketches, narrowing beside the whooshing whispers.

Twisting edges of the pages.
Jolting up and down, such low adhesive.
Single inch tape.
Losing handshakes with the wall.

Desert the first drawer.
Second drawer, all kinds of pencils and pens and markers.
Third drawer,
a mini town, filled- small, brushed pencils; herd of used pens, population of failed, frenzy brushes, empty bottles of acrylics– a circle– Tape!
Empty. All white plastic bones.

Another roll, empty.
Digging fingers like mole–
a small "Buy 1 Get 1 Free." At the edge.

Shaking the pinky with its thin nail on the tape– goin' in circles and circles as it rotates– bending nail– direction changes pinky to the left.
One smooth surface. Sketches crying for help.

Nail-rich hands, slipping in, to the tape, snatching it–
Thriving plum nail polish, Sahina.
Poker face, eyes down, focused fingers– pulling the fine translucent edge of the tape.
Squeaks, the plastic high tones, as it unwraps– opens her sealed lips, short bite.

Away from her lips, holding.

Black charcoal figures, motion blur in motion, hugging two lean torsos, tiny eyes filled with charcoal.

Holding the papers, shine on the plum nails– small bites three more pieces, on each corner.

Scattered collage, constellation.

Lines fluid, quick strokes, such hurry his bones used to.
Black abstraction. Each one almost human.

SAHINA LASKER

“Contrast what gives form."
Each stroke, compressed a hundred skin's notes.
A tornado morphing mass to its right rigidity,
blurs and veins, each figure incredibly human.

Sticking in tape dust and volume, the salt of her eyes.
Screeching tape loudest; no clock– air numbing itself.

Trips back to the art treasury, the empty roll. Shuts the drawers.

Flat to the last inch.

Smelling like her husband, as usual, but mildly. Fuming like sun the thin layer of life on the breasts.

Fuse fingers on the chair, dragging on the rug.
Mild screeches of the wood.

Quieter her whispery breathes– behind the ears.

TEHREEM LASKER

‘...Achu.’ Sahina sniffles, dragged the chair to the middle.
Hasn't worn her payal.

Desert the desk. Everything tiny and wide beneath swollen grains.
Left & right, swinging blue dupatta.
Smacks over the paperbacks, a branch-like fog of yellow dust.

She sneezes– pauses swinging chair.

The books he so readily read. All these colours, breaking their spines beyond the dust.

“Mummy said, she doesn't like eyes, that's why I avoid making them... he used to say. Such a liar, just like you, sketchbook filled with drowsy almond eyes.”
Grainy her voice.
Creases on the thick paperbacks, long thin white folds. Messy pile just as he liked.

*He hated dust and crumbs... everything we are letting thrive here.’
Muffling her voice, fast breeze.

‘He wanted to be a ballet dancer. “Highest form of art.” He said. Shy to tell you or your husband.’

Kitchen- bright colours, a lady smiling– polythene cover protector ripped off– almost in every book.

‘Am I adopted? He once asked… I said..I said.. knowing, yet, wish I told him the truth, I said..’
Gulp. 'Nahh..we just found you by the dumpster.’ Chuckling.

Hair spill, swallowing the back of the chair, pooling down– obsidian trail, the shine.

Streaks, white lines and a lump of yellow stain.
‘Crime & Punishment.’ Squeaks the wood. ‘Ended up…my last gift.’

Darker the black axe in the absence of the dust.
‘Haha..that fish….oil..’ Dry hiccups. ‘….He accidentally dropped it on its cover.’

Onto the new pile.

Hasty smacks, edges of the dupatta.
Aachu
‘Ugh…this rich purple….a mistake. A good one I'd say.’ Drenched her words, drippin’. “I want no vibrance, motion and body..should do the job." He said.'
Aachu

‘It will.. I replied…..hours! I have spent staring at this.’

Black window– cursed clouds, slothly, slow, crawling, snail.
Cold frame, cold concrete below.
So incredibly slow the clouds.
In layers the blacks, waves, far at the edges the greys.

Cold, bhichiya rotating around the toe. Dent, shoebite, jogging with Farook, similar winter days.
‘Tears in your eyes?’ *Hmph* ‘Why you bother?’

Tongue curls, spit out. ‘You always despised that I loved him more than you.’

‘Isn't that's opposite of what your husband thinks?....’ Spits on the rug.
‘That You love me more than your family, Huh?’
Incredibly slow clouds.
‘A vulgar assumption.’
Black, motionless, grey around the horizon.

‘It was amusing seeing his face that morning, knowing he smelt me.. all over you the previous night...’

Blurring the layers–

melting the waves.

‘You used me!’ Chair creeks violently.
‘ME!?’

‘YOU!!!’ Glaring ochre eyes. ‘YOU USED ME!’
Hands bashes on the side handles, erupts–
slams the oak wood.

Sealing door, the metal latch.

Swings to face, hand gripping curtain as crawls on prey.
Silvers gone, silver the bhichiya, yellow shine on all.

‘You dumped me.... treating me worse than a fucking condom.’ Gulps.
‘You fuckin....’
‘What this would...hm...solve?’
Her eyes widens– wet–
A bashful kick hammers at the chair.
‘Fuckk!! You!!’ Gulps. ‘I don't.. even know, what! Are you...’

‘Bitch? Slut? Huh??..’ Loosened up the bichhiya. ‘IT WAS A MISTAKE!’

‘FUCK YOU!’ Swift steps forward, her long black hair, dust clinging off the floor. ‘You let that happen…you wanted it….to.. to happen..’
‘I was not myself.. A MILLION TIMES!…YET, stop, Sahina, I don't like repeating my words…’

Kick nails on the rugged down chair. ‘Fuck!!!’
All the force hits on the tip of her heel.
‘Maybe….I..I.' Fucking slow clouds. ‘I didn't stop you…because..I, Fuck!…I dont–’
‘Not wanted to break my heart?’
‘I DON'T KNOW!’
‘LIAR, YOU USED ME!’ Heel crashes, same spot, goddamn wood. ‘YOU USED MY HEART….’
‘I WAS DROWSY, I DON'T REMEMBER FUCKING ANYTHING.. WOULD YOU BELIEVE THAT? Dream? IDONTFUCKINGKNOW.’

Fat single drops, thirsty the ratchet rug.
Lips quivering, as her fingers– prolonged sniffles.

‘OK…pray– to Allah for my demise..’

‘I did..’ Knees sink into the rug. ‘I prayed….Fuck!..Her smile.. the one you have with Farook…Make her sob….like I do. Break her heart, like mine breaks… that shard I feel in my chest, piercing more and more, depper, each second! You're away..’ Lips curl. ‘Without a veil, naked..why he listened?
UGHH
‘That cunt..took my brother instead..’ Rug soaks her spit in a split.
‘What cruel….savage… For such a revenge. Made my brother naked…wrapped in that ratchet! White cloth..just cause I took his name without a veil, wet and in a white sheet?’
Fatter drops.

CFL flickerin'. Yellowness in the tears. Shadows on the face.
Galloping everything.

Layers, each more soaked, more soggy.
Everything is behind them. Everlasting bitterness– gone the greys.

Moisture.
Copycat, God. Wet her lashes, eyes, undereyes and ochres.

Pinky nail flicks, bhichiya back in the toe, legs off the window.

Steady bad, sheets cold aren't depressing down without him–

Vague reflection in the portrait's glass. Fading blues and creams over the black.

Arms flare, wide grip on the wooden sides.
A gentle shake-
Heart throbbing in the fingers ends.
One nail off, weight on the edge.
Right arm pushing against a mountain.
Steady.
Steady.
Quick shake– off the middle ant metal hoop; tightens the grip.
Elbows jittering.
The left nail trips, mountain slides.
Frame bumps down in the narrowing hug, falling onto his bed.

Breaking the limbs, pushing, the wood bottom burying in the thigh.
Eyes open and sight charges for cracks– no cracks. No white glass dust around his hair, in his eye, unshifted smile.
'……What..' Sniffles. 'Why….you….'

Ran out of width, denting biceps.
Inch by inch out of the bed.
'Are you deaf…'
Towards the exit.
'Stop…'
Pacing feet, head sticks out- not so far the door.

Balance steep to the side. 'CAREFUL!!' Fingers pushing on the glass.

Quick steps back, slips her hands.
‘Put it back!’
‘Stay outt of ma-wayy.’

Sahina mounts in front of the door. ‘Fuck you!..Why?
‘None of your business...'
'IT'S MY BROTHER'S!...That he made with my sister, by the colours of my uncle.. don't fucking tell me-'
‘....Cousin..’
Gasps her eyes.

‘AHHHAH!’
The frame slips, crashes over the toes, the back hits the rug, glass shatters on the knees.
'Ugh.' Holding onto the desk leg.
Warm palm.
‘DON’T FUCKING TOUCH MEEEEE!’

Frame slipping close.
Cramped nose, warm, itchy, slippery, red.

Her trembling knuckles, blood.

Snatches away her hand, Sahina kneels, scraping the shards out from the toes; moving the frame up.

‘DON’T TOUCH IT!.... Don't touch me.’

SAHINA LASKER

Thick fat red drop, down, sits at the lap– soaking by her greys. Weight and blood on the elbow bone, hit, bent near his desk.
‘Immmm…Imm… Teh…’
A soft, pathetic knock echoes on the door.
Her blood in the air, on the knuckles, on the shards. ‘Teh…fuck..just, Reemi, listen….’ Fingers on the copper puddle, the upper lip. Blocked nose – no breath and sounds carrying her gasps.
‘HUH!!!!’ Gasps. Blood splatters off the nose. Nostrils too slim.
‘Letme..’ *Ouchh….* Rushes dented index, out of her clenched teeth.

‘YOU!’ Drops of blood. ‘Have no right on my son! Or on me…'
Frozen in those greens. Stretched lips, down– jaw shut, eyelids clenching to the edges.
Dented index, one last glass flake off, from her toe.

TEHREEM LASKER

Hammers the fist on the wall– her tears.
Shivering fingers jump to the side, catch something, notebook?

Metal squeaking, latch. Bony knocks.
THUD! Hits the metal handle.
Running pass, the knocking bones– her mother.

‘What is happening!!?’ squeals Nehruma.
Throats grunts and twists at her as she disappears.

Twists back, eyeing the blinking show, broken chair and everything she left.

‘What happened!’ asks Nehruma. Sprinting in– lifting the frame.

‘...What happened? ’ says Iram.

Holding the blue dupatta, groans, leaking toes, lifeless.
Hands on the desk, trips the cleaned book pile.

To the door, limping steps. Sweaty fingers, clinging grip, on the wooden sides.
Biceps denting, blood on hold.
Wooden frame, wide, wide his smile.

‘Careful!.. It still has broken glass attached.’

FAROOK LASKER

IV.VII

Teeth scraping down the tongue– transparent- green slime tipping below onto the scattered pile, crunchy yellow leaves.

Cold– the metal bench- density of the living room walls.
Swift & bendy the long branches up the right shoulder.
Surrounded by the perpetual dark olives of the trees. A small window of the vast blanket– that bitterness.

Crunches a few leaves. ‘Bad stomach??’ Long steps across the side, taps her finger on the metal.
Flutters the tongue. Tastebuds high on something, taste like soil mixed with battery acid.
Spits.

‘In the park?’
Air cozying in, thumping on the eardrums. Mumbles and coos her words.
Leaves drifting in the air.
Palms rubbing into each other, gritty skin.
‘You want one?’
Sparks of ivory lighter. Her mother's.

Fingers stick out.
Long, black, pure-extract cigarette, no bullshit.
Lips denting the filter bud. ‘These are good.’
Knees up, closed palms slither deep in the pockets of the loose denim jacket. Clunky blanket.

White smoke leaking through Ispara's nose, a calm waterfall, jostling away. ‘Wait…how?’
‘What?’
Pinky on the nose.
‘Ohh.’ Exhales. Mixing in the grey breeze, uncontrolled haste.

'THAT'S!'
‘Oh…it's easy…’ Lips dampen. ‘You just gotta resist the urge to breathe..and then it will automatically climb outta your nose.’
Cheeks suck in. Calm white smoke, meetin' hurricane wind. '…. Like this.'
‘Ohh…seems..not so easy.’
‘Whatever.’ Exhaling.

Sniffles.
‘Nose jammed?’
‘Ohh..you know, I'm dying, soil and acid on my tongue.’
'Rip.'
‘Not easy though… ’ Fingers open, gritty like a brick the denim. ‘You know the mind has a fail-safe.. it automatically makes you breathe when you try to hold it, not let you bite off your fingers and meat even though you're very capable of that..fucking..stuff.’ Long puff.

‘Ahmm!’ Doesn't go from the nose.

‘Fuck nose.. your way, when it leaks like a beam from the middle teeth slit, way cooler.’ Petting the back.
‘Nope….Ahmm.’

Hhmm… whatever…’ Smoke leakin’ from the teeth gap. ‘Smoke gotta crawl out of somewhere.’
‘I KNOW RIGHT!’

Gulmohar rustling against the tickling, whipping wind. Jolting green seed pods.

‘These are good.’
‘Hm-hmmm.’ Light on the nose, flavourless becomes the spit.
Tsk-tsk. ‘Yk..hmm..If we weren't…like, have consciousness, we would be like cats.’

‘Not even cats.. just something inferior.’ Ivory adds.
‘Yea..cats are superior.’
‘YEA..YEA..YEA..’
‘Egyptians worshipped them for a reason.’

‘Yea.. like for others, monkey or something..for myself, I think it's not superior than a cat.. you feel me?’
‘life?’
‘Yea.. if I had no consciousness... I would sleep as much Nancy does and just live a life without all the shit.’
‘Mm...Cool, tho....me, personally would like to be a pebble in.. next life.
Fffff ‘No, next life, Mamu..just void.’
‘Shutupp.’ Fingers loosen, winds take the bud in the mid-air. ‘You got more?’
‘one.’

No flowers– on Gulmohar. It doesn't bloom in Oct.

‘Why, you're doing this internship, anyway?’
‘Hm...’ Her jaw– took a moment to nod. ‘I don't know...' Holding her hand high, pinky long cig flies away– red and orange sparks as it continues to fume.
High oxygen black clouds.
Only black clouds.

None of these trees has flowers.
Soggy brown ridges on the fingers,
Ebony let go, swimming in the wind. Far in the waves.
Sparks. Gone in the winds.

‘It isn't for long..I'mma out of this shit.’ Sinking in the bench.
‘Are..you ok?’
‘Are we really askin’ that?’
‘I mean obviously all this happend…’ Eye parting ways. Moisture.
Star the eyeline, tears ton on the barrier– Saniya’s spirit.
Looks away, smoke through nose.
‘Yeahh..it's a lot, but… Everything's all right? With you..?’
‘Yea..’

‘Like a cat always lands on its feet?’
‘YEA, YEA, YEA..’

‘Sometimes you remind me of both, your father and mother.'
Sniffle. ‘I don't remind… Of me..?’
‘Of course. You're best of both of them.’
‘Hm-mmh..?’
‘Yea…You're best of all of us..that makes you, an incredibly different person..’
'You're avoiding saying "unique."
Haha
Chuckles.
‘You'd find that cliché…'
‘Totally.’ Sniffle.

‘No sleeve… Aren't you cold, Ispara?’

SALMAN LASKER

IV.VIII

The cheap decomposing AC melting the nose.
Invisible breaths sneaking in, tiny lip gaps. ‘I swear, Boss.’
‘Oh, really?’ replies the bald, skinny merchant.
A motionless nod.
Wrinkles on his nose bridge. ‘And this time?’
‘Same, family things.’
Bald sighs with his fat tongue out. ‘I don't want to argue with you,
Salman. Just…be done with your work afterwards-’
‘Sure.’
Launching out of the office.

Wide shoulders hitting frown ones– excused crowd.
Vibrating phone off the jeans. ‘COMING!'

Shoulder push on the glass door– ‘Hey! Where’s Chacha?’
‘Idontkno…he's unreachable,’ replies Nehal from the other side.

Nasty winds, clouds similar to Beast’s skin.
Quick taps on the screen. Another number– ‘Have you seen Chacha?’

‘Park??’ Forehead pinches. ‘…Thanks.’
Phone tosses back in the brown leather jacket.
Cold– seat, the metal bars, full twist.
Rampage against darting wind.
Sailing smooth– empty curb– vehicles away from roads like birds.

Beast crushing the tar further down the road.

Back exit of the colony–
Grey buildings, clones, in spam.

Narrow concrete entrance of 5.B Park.
Lonely motherfucking place. Long trees, dry leaves.

‘Chacha!’ Beast’s exhaust grunts alongside. ‘Chacha!’

End of the pavement, slowing wheels.
A man lay on that bench surrounded by trees. Mix of grey hair.
‘Chacha..’
‘….Wha?’
‘Get up….your officer called.’
‘Mine??’ Farook Yawns. 'I don't own him, Salman..?’
‘Get up!’

‘Easy…’
‘Aren't you cold? Sleeping in this wind in a half sleeve?
‘Built different…’ Thin branches jolting, hazardous gulmohar.
‘Go.’
‘Handling it all by himself–’
‘I don't care. If Prashad continues to fail, take actions in your hands. I'll see the aftermath.’ Taps on the shoulder. ‘Fly this thing.’

Acceleration on its high, Beast grunts, lonely 5B roads giving cherry to the race.
‘Why you smelling like a wet dog??’
‘What…?’
‘Huh?’

‘Nevermin….’
Last turn–
Cracked concrete, bricks popped & scattered like acne– road clustered, fucked exist– grip on the shiny hand breaks.

Tires crawl on the soil edge. 'God, I hate this place.'

Fingers rush, full twists, to the main road.

Entering–
Semi-urban, stone office of the Officer.
Beast's broad front tire knocks on the staircase.

Two guards outside the door, fingers clenching on the wood, parted ways their eyes as the necks tilt. Uniforms reeking of sweat instead of samosa oil, mint chatni, or sugar of jalebi.
Fingers right on the long narrow neck, slow-loading rifles
Farook gives a side-eye, stepping in.

Barely any propellant in them.

Piss and cheap bleach.
Nose shrinkin'.

In the shadows; hiding behind the newspaper, revealed fists clenched on both sides.
'Prashad..'
'Oh..Mr. Lasker, finally.' Newspaper shoves to the side in a cardboard box.
'Atrocious itch, Prashad. Don't mind.' Farook takes the chair. 'Spill EVERYTHING without a brake..Please.'
'Yes..yes.' Straightens his tall legs. 'Follow me.'
'Wait where?' Arms crossed. Officer doesn't look back.
'I have something to show.' Continues walking deeper in the passage– inmates left and right, squealing, laughing, moaning.

End of the passage. Red bricks, ageing in moisture.
Officer turns– head down, rock-carved small entrance on the left.

Shoulders tilt, steps finding their footing– inside the portal of the void.
Blood.
Click Beams' blue & yellow shades of the flashlight.
Thick metal bars.
Two bloody silhouettes.
Scoots wood. Bamboo chairs.
‘Sit.’

Giant shadows of the bars cast deep in the cell like roman pillars.
Ugly purple- bluish shut eyes.
Bent spine & blood leaking from somewhere down.
Hands close, holding onto the fragile bench; old bamboo, termite’s saliva.

‘Who are these boys?’ asks Farook.
‘This fat one.' Officer points to the sobbing fat boy. 'Was your son’s schoolmate. And this..’ Flash nudges the uglier one – ‘Black one, found hopping through the shortcut of 5B, the vacant apartments way.’

Swollen as a wasp bite, blood-drooling lips.
‘Amzat Ansari, lives at 2B/4… In the CCTV, he went three times from that path on 20th Oct.’
‘Any confession?’ Farook steps closer to the cell.
‘No..’
‘What do you mean NO??’ Lowers his face.
‘… We…I tried everything! I snatched his nails off, yet-’
Spit passes the cell bar. ‘USE MORE FORCE.’
‘…..No.’ His knuckles knock on the bar. ‘Until it's confirmed that these are the ones…’
‘Can you-’
‘No!’ Farook shuts the Officer. ‘They reek in their own filthy blood.’
‘Do you think if these, killed a Lasker, they'll be fool enough to carry the smells??’

Long breath. ‘Anything else?’ Stepping away from the cell.
‘Not now.’ Officer gulps.

‘As if…you enjoy.. wasting our time…’

Hands on the chair, strides haste, hammers it on the bars. Metal jolts violently–
fat one sobbing in a high pitch.
‘DO ANYTHING NECESSARY! OR I'LL DO EVERYTHING…WOULD FIND NECESSARY….’
Farook marches out of the chamber.

Officer's eyes and flash glued on the broken legs, the smacked chair–
sweat soaking in the shirt.
‘Keep the search up….incase these faggots aren't the culprits.’ Tight spine.
Darker the exit– muddy rat hole.

Heads lean back in. ‘Officer! By all means necessary.’

IV.IX

ISPARA LASKER

Yellow lantern– oil burning slowly.
White candies in the plastic jar, lime yellow in the oil light. ‘Can I take one more??’
‘Pass me one too.’
Plastic tabs, tired Pallavi’s cell’s keys.
‘Keep dialling, Lav.’
Bean-sized candies, flavours like vanilla, French-kissed mint and both cheated each other with toothpaste. ‘Catch.’
In her fist without looking, skills.
‘Ring’s going…’ The bean tosses in her mouth.
Pouty lips extra red in this light.
Wide charcoal shadows blacking the rest of the shed.
‘So….’
‘Said, he'll be here before you get bored.’
‘Ughh.’ Tapping on the jars– shoulders stretch lower, wooden stool scoots further back. ‘I’m bored.’
‘I know, Ispara.’

Fucking rain clouds– monsoon isn't over.
‘What you think??’
‘It'll rain..’
‘You sure??’
Teeth on the nails, litter hamster–
head resting, elbow digging into the right knee.
‘It’ll rain "deducley.” Tongue flatters. ‘New word I learnt today. Means heavily or extremely.’
Cell on the white counter. ‘We'll dance…’
‘Absolutely.’ Punch in the air, cracks joint of the elbow. ‘Whenever's sky grey & white, puff down the lungs, flesh swimming in the air…cause..’
‘Cause all we got is shadows of each other.'
‘AND?’

‘AND ALL DOWN HILLsss FROM HERE…’ Grin, fills Lav’s small face.

'Huh…. I somehow got you to sing with me.' Chuckles. ‘Its so hard to forget school, Ispara.’
‘ALLLL DOWN HILLL FROM HEREE’
‘Yeahhhh, uhhhh, ohh, ohhhh…cause it'sss alll down hill from here..’
Hahaha ‘Everyone smiled at us, almost the best summer..’
‘Yea… Almost..’ Hand on the back of the shoulder. Paternal tabs.
‘Stop.. I'm ok.’
‘I know.. it's not "paternal pats".
‘Whatever… Where's your brother…’

‘Your dad would be proud of you, Ispara.. You have come so far..’
Ffff

Nose clogging off, catchin' smells of oil, grease, moss and air.
Yellow and black the sky.

Pattin’– Lav’s narrow fingers.

Blue the spark in its middle, candle like, warm– black smoke coming out of its narrow glass end.
‘Ugh…’ Yawns. ‘I'm bored now too.’

Kids running, peeps stranding– greys mixing in the atmosphere, blending air.
‘Watch’u think of….’
‘Oh.. cats absolutely go to heaven… or God doesn't exist and it's just void afterwards.’
‘Hmm…’ Bean's slow-dissolving, hard, morning toothpaste – Off the tongue, it flicks off. ‘You got gums?’
‘Nope.’ Bean cracking like a cracker. ‘….So where do you find your refuge…??'
‘I don't fucking know..maybe the idea that we can come back as ghosts to finish our shit, is comforting.'

‘Hmm..Told you, the ghost idea makes more sense…’
‘Whatever.’

Screeching brakes, teetering gravel into each other outside. ‘Oh there he is…’
‘Yess! Finally.’ Hands on the counter, legs off the ground, in the air, out; tips the bean jar, feet on the soil.
‘Careful.’
Old rose-coloured scooter– cloudy without the sun.
Priyanshu gets off and takes out two blockish canisters.
Drags down, stretching his long arms.
‘Ispara.’

The canisters sit on the gravel. His hands rubbing.
‘You’re still crawling on the basketball courts??’
‘Less…Papa got me work on work.'
Hair shorter, oval face like center of dandelion.
‘Coach miss…’ Scratching his head. Slow breaths.
‘Huh?!’
‘I miss you…’
‘Don't.’ Chuckles.
‘Ok.. let's go.' Pallavi, with her long steps, taps on the back.
‘You took your pills?’ He looks at Lav.
‘Yep..’
‘Make sure to not break her heart.’
‘No promises, Blondy.’ Blond hair.
Stepping away.

‘He’s a talker…’
‘Sometimes.’ Hair's bound in a bun.
‘Chai-N-Cigs later??’
Head turns, fingers form a speaker. ‘KEPPP DREAMINN.'
Lav laughs.

Pacing out the crub.
Shadows getting darker.

Clouds trailing.

‘Eshh…’
Steps tremble, metal wire.
‘Wait.. you ok??’ Palms up.
‘Watch the floor…Ispara.’
‘Hm..Hm..’ Self-control breaths.

Each building’s a replica of the other, white and greys– memories of blues, stained drips of all the rains that washed them.

Broken windows, yellow light, similar bulbs– vapours of something– meaty escaping from the gaps.

Wide naked spread, the huge sky window, just before the turn– ‘Are we in hell?’ Pauses her squeaky slippers.
Contrast– haze headed to the horizon.
‘No, I ain’t feeling the burning.’
‘Hm….This is better than summer tho… ugh fuck mosquitos.’

Jumps over the cut tree trunk.
‘You said, I'll tell you later…but you never did.. hmm, what's her name?’
‘What name?..’
‘Ohh..don't play fool… you think I'm not nosy? I smell…a lady..’
‘Shut up, Lav..’
‘TELLLLL ME.’
Lungs itch, fingers bury deep in the pockets– gripping on the cigarette–

‘Please…..’

‘There’s nothing to tell, Pallavi.’
Chk *Chk* revolves the metal gear, puny sparks. *Chk*

A quick puff.
Lighter back in the jacket's pocket.
Quieter, frequencies deaf of the nose– weightless the air, sky, the kitchen at the right.
‘Very bad lia–’

‘No lies. There's nothing to tell, as I said..’

More broken windows.
A mother on the chabutra, holding a kid, baby boy crying rivers.
‘Or…if you don't trust me.. you can just say it clearly.’
‘UFFF…Bitch’
‘Please?? Ambushed by the long fingers.

Palm shut in a fist, deep in the jacket.
Fillin’ lungs–
‘She moved on, end. ….There's nothing left.
‘Hmm… Riza, right??’ Petting the shoulder. ‘Dude, love sucks.’
Eyes blurring.

‘Hey..you want mints? That shop has some.’
‘Nahh.’
Warm nose canals.

‘How was hmm…’ Clears throat– Long step to the side, sparky cig down the empty dustbin.
‘Lab reports?’

Face frowns, looking down, cracking her index. *Snap*
‘I don't know…. some shit with my heart..’ Middle finger *Snap* 'It's apparently weak.’ Stretches pinky *Snap*

Strong shoulders, swift pats. ‘Don't worry, it's strong enough.’

Arm cross. ‘Huh… It's close, right…' Completes the hug.
‘Yeah.’
Another turn, more shops– fewer buildings. 'It'll feel better when I beat his shit up.’

‘Hm..hmm.. Hushh…’

‘The fucking roses… were so expensive… spent all my pocket money…’
Cough *Cough* ‘Wasted on someone who doesn't even deserve it.’
‘He’ll pay, don't worry..’ Sale on Princess pointy heels. ‘Just keep the long..steady breaths.’
Red heels.
‘Yea…your dad taught you these?
‘Ammi.’
‘Cool.’ *Cough* ‘She…also knows Karate??’
‘Yea…taught me. She's a badass.’
‘COOL.’

Trees replacing the loop of standing apartments; black shadow of green leaves. Turn on the big turn; tall grass and steep soil, end of the way.
‘Is this–’
‘Yes.’
‘Thank God. My legs are starting to kill me.’ Lav rolls her sleeves down.
‘Same.’ Palms pushing through the mushy, thriving bushes.
Small steps– surrounded by greens.

Soft leaves on thin branches– sweeping by– sharp.

Browns. Narrower path.
‘Fuuuuuuuuffff!’ Flunks out, spitting out. ‘GOD!!… DO I HAVE ANY SPIDERS ON ME??’
Fingers moving like a wide comb.

‘Nope…but just below on your thigh a cute jumping spide-’
‘Ewww.’ Running ahead.
‘Wait…. haha..easy, Pallavi..’

Thirsty breaths, her arching back, knees pause–
‘Don't rush…’
‘I don'….its just, fuck, we really gonna beat him??’

Soggy red soil. Giant blur, no texture, moisture.

Red splatters on the black football boots.
‘Maybe…’

Reforestation going fresh and green, under wild veins, the incomplete apartments and their wrecks.

Cemented, green, must've been the home of a million spiders and empty webs.
‘You remember, Akansha?? From 11th??’
‘Hmm..’

Broken windows, vomity shades. ‘Those motherfuckers, never get caught, do they?’ Spider webs.

‘No…’ Pallavi steps closer.
Door torn apart, hanging on a last breath, galloped by moss, red and green. ‘Bright girl…. She helped me with my science, remember, our syllabus was almost identical.
‘And upon that, leaked papers… everyone passed except me..’
‘That summer feels cursed.’
‘Yes.’

That blackness beyond the door gaps.
A faint hint of copper that's carrying no name.

Fingers itching the nose.
‘Rest in peace.’
Air slips through her nose in a high pitch. ‘Om Shanti.’

‘How you guys say it?’
HmH ‘Inna lillahi wa inna…mm, ilayhi raji'un.’
‘Ah..’ Pallavi nods. Hands break apart, stepping ahead.
Lungs expanding on the bounds of the rib cage. ‘You come…from him, you return to him.’

‘Hey.. what's going on?? You ok?’

Neck nods. ‘….Keep looking ahead.

Wall of greens closing in.
Branches– sharper, dense, dry.
Scraping off the denim.
Arms close, pushing the lifeless snakes– a clean way.

‘Here it is.’

Steep soil–
A giant steel net, vast sideways as a railroad.
‘Careful, bitch’s kinda rusted.’

Sharp thick collage of wires– ‘Careful, Ispara.’
Torn apart at the bottom– hole size of a big cat. Hard steel– ‘EEYEA.’
Folding edges, paper.

Horizon, toothpaste bean, lime yellow– mixin' the whites.
The sky split in half, blank and black.

Ivory wraps in a bun, falling down a hat-trick of brown leaves.
‘A hand…..’ Gasps.
‘Wait.’ A loose wire stuck on the sock, scraping a red line on her skin.
Fishhook fold. ‘All good, now.

Off the crunchy remains.

Long legs, springy hands.
‘Is that him??’ Jacket wraps around the waist, two chunky sleeve knots.

Naked arms. Lashes running down on the desperate winds.

Ivory flowing.

Gaping low-hanging mouth, restless chest–
Himanshu: In an expensive black jersey. Sharp rigid breaths, tongue going in and out, limping dick.
Throwing balls– hard cricket balls– red Cosco.
Thud!! Jolts the steel net.

Thud!!
On each hit, net aching, a coughing baby.
Tall yet fit limbs, similar height.

Warm fingers on the cold wrist. ‘WHAT?’
‘Talk first…ok.’ Widens Pallavi's eyes, her stumbling breaths.

‘Ofcourse! I don't have fucking rabies..’ Snatches the arm back.

THUD!!!

Motherfucker using whole upper body to throw a ball.

‘Oye! Maggi-noodles…’ Curley hair.

A big box near his feet, pulling balls after each throw.
Few Coscos lay around his skinny legs. Rich boy shorts.
THUD!!!!

'Never mind, Ispara, let's go…’

Closer and closer.
Thud!!!!!
‘Heyy!’

Panting like a pug, fingers gripping another ball.
‘Oye..’
Drenched in sweat, eyes glued at the titan net.
‘Fuck you!’ Arm jolts, pebble lands on his chest.

Turns, limbs down, squinting–
‘You're…that bitch intern.’ Spits– lands on his shoe. Wiping his sweaty face. ‘…Who kicked my brother..in the nuts… aren't you?’
Smirking, lips quaking like a stroke.
‘He saw your back, sexy, white hair. “She's as tall as you.” Smooching the sipper.
‘How dare you kick my brother!?’
‘Who……oh, that lil goblin, won't disrespect dead people now.’

No bat or anything– weaponish.
‘Whatever…fuck off.’ The sipper smacks on the grass.

Bending butt, another ball.
Thudd!!!
‘We won't, untill….hey listen, dickhead…AMENDS!!'

Hushhh ‘Oh…so that's why she's with you, Whity?’

Tongue between the jaw as it clenches.
‘You either.’ Breath out. ‘You'll pay the money she spent on the roses.’
Elder goblin chuckles. ‘Go check the dustbin of the school ground.. aren't you interns do that already??’
‘Fuckyou!! You'll return every rupee and apologise to her RIGHT NOW!’
‘Get lost..’
THUD!!!!

‘Oh, You'll apologise… and pay! Here or at school in front of everyone..your choice.’
‘Bitch you lost your mind? Spits, ruins the boots. ‘How'll you make me???’

‘Now..Ispara..we should… go-’
‘Fuck no..’
‘You though, huh?’ Big wide smirk.
THUD!

Knees down, the shin clashes against the back of his leg.
Curls down on the grass.
Hard black spikes-
‘Ahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!’ Punctures his knuckles, bones crushing beneath extra long, narrow studs.
Weighing his chest, squishy as a wet blanket, the belly– calloused knuckles drive to the face.
Scrummy long face.

Knuckles- mouth.
Knuckles- socket.
Knuckels- cheek bones.

Slips the bandage, thumping fists.
Hitting the bones, soft & hard, rare fat of the rat's oily face.
Blood gushing around the eardrums, quiet & night the knuckles, fading sirens howling at a mansion's distance; flooding out.
Quivering fish, the eyelashes.
Fish, jolting his left arm– hooks down by the piercing nails- denting the inked butterfly on his bicep.

Knuckles- lashes.
Red drops hanging down eye whites– puddle around sinkin’ eyelids.
Ahhhh! ‘I…. Can't see!!!!’
Flickering Free arm begging a grab on the knee.
Fishy punctured hand sets free, clutches on the neck.

Fist att the nose! Blood splatters– reddened the lens.
Bun falls in front– reds splashing over ivory.

Numbs the shaking limb knot, cold, cold, slips off the neck.
Lukewarm, leakin’ nose, ratchet gaps.
Boiling, the erect veins of the fists, of the fingers, palms wrap a hoop to his neck.

‘AHHHHh..’ Opens the burst lips, flying hits the cheek bone, his ruptured tooth.

‘UGHHHHHHH!’ Jitters his shoulder.
‘Ahh!!’ Red-ivory strands kickback on the green grass.
'I……cNT….see…e…..'
‘AHHH!’ Ivory pushing her palms around her eye socket.
‘FUCKKYOU!’ Grate teeth her fists.
Rushes, trips– red-wet Cosco–
'Ughh!' Fingers crawl to his shirt, pulling him.
Blood tipping down her knuckles back to the face. Slips and hammers, warm shades to neck, growing ratchet his breaths.
‘Sav….’
THUD!
THUD!
THUD!

Warm drenched & slippery, swinging ivory side bangs.

A wind swings, metal thud!
Ivory falls.

‘Fuckkkkkk! Ispara…. Why you gotta…’ *Hussssshhhh* Falls the metal sipper, folding the jittering fingers.
Gasps. Pallavi’s punching her chest.
Million short breaths.

‘Sav…me..sa….’ Drops ejaculating, where was the nose.
Fingers crawling, denting grass, ant-like to find another ball.

‘Sav……..Sa…’

IV.X

MANGO WOOD

Blinds wide open.
No crickets tonight.

Exact same cobalt blue out there as the walls of the dining room.
Not even one cricket.
Single CFL, the dim kind, above the blinds, adding faded yellows.
Hands on their laps on top of the white cotton napkins.
Backs lean against the chairs facing the almost room-length dining table, mango wood.

No clocks– except the tiny ticking of Salim's wristwatch.
Nehruma from the past five minutes, nonchalantly signing him to cover it.

Noses are down.
No dust– though dining opened after months. Persists the yellow shine of the mango wood.
No appetites after Sohail Lasker died.
Jaundiced vomits– splattered on the napkin, table, chair– pill blur, heart rub.
Saniya wiped his wet lips with her red sleeves. Kept leaking, repeated wipes of the red sleeves, heart beating slower and slower beneath her palm.

Saniya's holding her kerchief close to her face.
Her sight's down, nose lower.
Slow breaths, Vicks-filled nostrils–
No mango, no elegance of the delicacy behind the closed dishes.

But a sickness, rotten milk– kheer, his last meal.

Vicks in Sauhana's nose, faintly on the upper lip, eyes closed, arms flared & chin resting on the table.

Ispara, next to Saniya, bandages on her fists and forehead, hanging strands ‘front the face, chin resting on her palm– elbow bruised, on the table.

‘Finally, everyone together… ’ Chair scoots back, wooden titles– Shezad stands.
The screech pierces through Sauhana’s closed eyelids, jolts her head– back straight. ‘Wh….’ Rubbing her eyes.
'…back at the dinner table….’
Family hums.
‘Bhai Sahab, I can't…’ Saniya frowns and turns her head, and the kerchief falls on the floor. Fingers holding the lace of her white frock as knees run away from the kitchen and its mango wood.
Iram and Nehruma Lasker tilt their eyes, watching her go.
‘Waitt…Ammi..’ Sauhana gets up.
‘You don't want to eat, kiddo…?' says Salim.
'Later…' Following her mother out.

Fists on the table, soft thud, holding– ‘No one will question her…' says Sehzad, eyeing his wife, Iram.
‘We all remember… the last dinner. He died here…he was just like my brother. We remember, don't we???’
Family hums.
‘WELL REMEMBER THIS ONE AS WELL!’ Fists up and on the wood.
‘I miss him, I dread our losses as much as you do.. I may join them soon… but before that. You all listen to me. And answer to me.’
'Of course, Papa.’ Says Nehal.
‘Shut up.’

‘Quit playing with paper towels.’ Salman licks his tongue.

‘SUSHHH!’ *COUGH* 'TWO KIDS!!! BLOOD ON THEM! HUH!!?... NEHRUMA, where's Sahina??’
‘Hm...’ Her eyebrows up high, stretches her wrinkly fingers on the table. ‘YOU CAN'T PROTECT TWO KIDS OF OUR OWN FAMILY!? YOU'RE THIS MISERABLE? SO BLINDLY AT CUNNING, YOU CAN'T SEE OVER YOUR KIDS!!?’
Fists slam on the table. Trips his steel glass.
‘LOOK AT HER EYE...BLACK AS THE NIGHT! Where you all at!?’
‘Be easy...’ says Iram.
‘Silence!’ The chair scoots back in place. ‘How...how Farook found her?’
‘Unconscious, bleeding from the head, black eye, a few broken knuckles-’ Salman takes a deep breath. 'And-'
‘Enough.’ Says Salim.

‘This?... This is the care we promised? Streets away from her home... beaten and tortured? With what face would I meet her father if something happened to her??’
‘Who’s responsibility would it be??’ Shezad adds.

Silence.

‘... Mine... own...'
‘Shut up, kid,' says Salman.
‘We are your guardians, child... it would be ours.’ Shezad sighs. ‘What about the boy?’
'Worse... muscle fractured, eyes gone, face flat, cracked ligaments, broken bones... other... stuff,' replies Salman.
‘F.I.R?’
'No... parents are unaware.’
‘Hm...' The metal cover of the dish opens. ‘Begin.’

Filling shiny silver cutlery with warm food, moderate black peppers.
'Bismillah...'
‘Bismillah.’ Everyone.

‘And you...' Shezad points at Salim. ‘Get Farook back at the labs as fast as you can.’

‘What about the girl who hit her??’ Says Salman. Tsk tsk.
‘The one who-’ Salim looks at her.
‘Nothing about her. Forget her, leave, don't mess with her.’ Ivory’s piercing eyes on Salman’s shoulders.

Shrugs– ‘Ok…Whatever.’ Chewing his bite– mutton stew.

IV.X

TEHREEM LASKER

Foam on top of his head crumbles like glitter.
These grey waves, a few black ones– gliding hands, sailing.
Dibs in the tub, warm– emptying palm puddles, thriving the foam.

Blinding darks of the eyelids, skin relaxing on the lifting vapours.

‘Girl or boy?’
‘Boy.’ Silky pretty hair.
‘Any names?’
‘Hasn't occurred.'
‘You’re intoxicating me.’ Leaning back, lost weight his back, like back then.

Turns, holding waist, foamy fingers on his shoulders, warm.
Warm open-pored body.
Warm shallow water.
Hands on skin as if collecting autumn leaves.

Arms tug, as if collected all the autumn leaves.

‘I’m..sorry’
‘Sush..’
His soft fingers.
‘It was a mistake..’ Fusing. Close– close to him.
‘I MISS HIMM SOO MUCH…’ Arm scarf, kisses.

Falls, all the leaves down the tub, fingers on the face, lips closer, breathing and ochres hazy, as if drunk.
‘I miss him.. too.’

PART FIVE

TEHREEM LASKER

V.I

Naked scented shoulder– brown musk, always pouting sideways, gliding.
That missed wide smile– wide. Shifts and latches on the index like a snake, warm fist, flower-bed. Wide smile.
Oh, such comfort, the browns in the red sheet– gilly skin, sinkin' dimples, wrinkles around the cheeky eyes– smarky ochres.
'Staring contest???' Tongue out, puppy.
'Child.' Hands off the browns– on the window.
Hahamm Never keep his fingers to himself.
Tall grass greying without colour.

A pigeon coos.
Gripping fingers. 'Stop it….'
Steadily tracing his index on the contour.
Silver ring, warm as summer– a kalam, cursive, F-a-r-o-o-k. A heart.
Made the jeweller carve the font as it was on his watch.

His ochre eyes, drenched, incredibly wet, missing kajal the eye line– yet night,the lashes.

On the trail of the lower back. Nudges the bones towards himself.
'Ahistaa!…' In his arms.
'Sush…you're safe.' Highlights in his eyes, glitter.

Inhales-exhales, R&B.

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‘I missed you.’
‘Me too.’

Smells the same, his hair.
‘I wanna sleep…’

‘We have all day… every day, it's ours.’ Caramelized tongue, serving sweet whispers.

‘You were remembering her, around that time…?’ Breathing his heart.
‘I don't remember anything. Except you. Everything else…hmmm..stopp……’ Warm– as tears in his eyes. ‘….She was..’
‘Everything else??’ Featherful lips.
‘Mistake….mmmm..mistakes. ’

***

Yearned skin, clock hands skipped– vulgarly fast.

FAROOK LASKER

Smiling the unmerging skin against hers. Sweat situated on and spread like shabnam.
Tried its best to melt & fuse the skin, like maps.
Shyly expends her chest, candle-blowing breaths.
Crawling hands around the back, usual as she climbs.
Swift air banging the window, on some white beard's rude advice.
Fast moments make her cry.
Tears in her eyes– Like last night.
'Obnoxiously obsessed she was, wasn't...?' Smelling like God, her hair.
'Hm... she was... there was a time when... I tried to miss her..' Tightens arm scarf. 'I don't miss her..' Tighter. 'I don't love her. I was upset that she died.. but the.. hm... Now at least she'll meet her baby...?'
'Our baby.'
'Yea..We raised him.. best. He surpassed everything we thought...'
Slither her fingers where they always go, depths of the belly button.
'You made my promise come true...ful...and-'
'Fulfilled..'
'Yeah....' Deep breaths.

'I want you to fill your heart..with me, Tehreem.'
'It is.' Rose petals her lips.
'Then-' Blooming petals reaching, breathing, on beneath– highschool kiss. 'Let it... burst for me...please.'
'Then..eat its pieces. You'll.....you'll only taste yourself.'

'...I'd taste only you..'
On something mellow, the dark olive eyes.

Salt, salt, sweat, her and only hers; the scent, all edible, gourmet.
All the tears– stayed, melting discussion.

Pheromones fuming right from bones, through her pores– the missing rib– same soil– same creator– same scent.

‘Sahina reminded you of her?’
‘Hm…’ Her head sinks into the bicep. ‘Hmm.. I'm..sorry..Farook.’
‘Mistakes fuckin’ mistakes…don't deserve apologies, Teh..’
‘Yea.. something that doesn't even seem to be present in my mind.. like fuck… only glimpses, horrounndously…’ Hands preachin’, hair smellin’ the same.
Sweat did its fusion.
‘Sushhhhh.’
‘I’m..unable to forgive myself.’
‘See yourself from my eyes..’ Her eyelids– ‘You'll be able to.’
‘Don’t take revenge.’ Her eyes, forest– only if jump, vanish and die.
The greens.
‘I won't.’ Jolts limb in the motion, burying, soft skin, her heights. ‘I'm taller, as you, in another dimension.’
‘Decaying without you in every other dimension.’
‘lett-me hold you, it's just us… everything else is prison.’

‘We are taller though..’ Tracing her index on the love bite. ‘If you stand on your toes, same height, tall…we're tall, Farook.’

V.II

DINING ROOM/ NEHRUMA LASKER

‘You couldn't take something, hmm.’ Big bites, same last night's food.
‘Without spice? Eggs? Bread and tea??’
Moving lips like bored buffalo. ‘Shhh…let me eat.’

Iram, such a slow eater, it's been– ‘MINUTES!.’
‘Hm? You said something.’
‘Eat your food.’
Shrugs, shoving drenched bites.

Wiping the bowl with the piece of naan.
‘You want…more??’
Salim nods.
‘MORE STEWW!’ Cough. ‘Third bowl, please, a big one, filled with gut-turning spices…heated and warm.
‘Shut up….’

Empty bowls in her palms, ant-ish steps. ‘Mercy, Salim.. be grateful of Allah and have some space in your chambers…*Bruf*’

‘What’s her problem?’ His eyes skip from Iram.

‘What is your problem!’ Thud on the mango table. ‘Ah..’
‘What?’
'Don't you find this unfair??..’ Dumb depths, generic ochre, the dumbest.
Eyebrows stretch, putting the bite down.
‘You've been consistent at the factory but instead of acknowledging that your brother wishes for that clumsy weeping baby to take your place!’
Salim gulps.
Licking his tongue.
‘Not you again with this….’ The chair shifts out to the side, leaning.

Head tilt, spice on the fingers, pointing at the wall before. ‘Farook and Sohail at Baba’s side, why? They carry his wisdom. Me and Bhai Sahab there on Ma's side, why!? Cause we carry her strength, her precision. Do you SEE!?... WHAT WE GET AND WHAT WE HAVE IS WELL DESERVED.’
Teeth against teeth. Clenched-jaw smile.

‘Yet…’ Tsk tsk. ‘Each got equal space, their own portrait. Equal. Don't. Never bring this again.’
‘….Hmm…’ Scalp scratch. 'Ox-brained…'

Nehal puts a bowl of stew ‘front of Salim.
‘Good, son.' All delight carrying this mutton stew.
‘Nah..Nah.. be here kid… serve this hungry beast some more bowls..’
Windy steps to the door.

‘Listen.. Nehruma..’ Mumbles the munching buffalo.

SANIYA LASKER

V.III

December breeze in the form of drops– fallin' soaking on the skin.
Unmoving behind the bathroom blinds, ivories on the white tub's headrest.
H_2O – tip, tip, tip, flooding out.

Ivories, soaking wet.
Tick— Tick— Tick— dying clock.

Artificial muzzle. Cold splatter.

Brain freeze.

Saniya holding her knees, nails dug into her skin. Blow the knees.
A crumb of red– tipping down– on her monochrome palette.
Muffling– twitches sealed lips. 'You… You… You promised me White Ferrari.'
Did.

'What…Your words…now..?'

Teeth stuttering.
'Coward…ran away… no care..no.. care.. for, for our daughters.
'..Ur..God didn't save..you.'

Hands down, on the knees, unmoving.
Arctic bed.
Water sheet to the chin.
Unbothered skin, brows and white lashes. Eyelids crawling— down— down-

Saniya's sleeping. Always fall asleep when the cold's familiar.
'Why u gotta…gotta..leave…'

Nails blue, her skin shrinking.

‘Ammi…hmm are you in there.. You asked but hmm..I can wash it myself.’
Knock *Knock* *Knock*
‘You don't have to wash.. all the fuckin’.. I know you don't like this smell of blood N all…Mummy??’ Knock. Knock.
‘Are you in there??’
Knock *knock* ‘I know you in there, Mummy? I can see your silhouette.. don't….hmm..?’
Off the white no sleeve shirt, covered in patches of blood. ‘Mummy??’
Droplets hitting the titles, tip- tip- tip.
‘Aummy??… Answer or I'll go away..’

V.IV

SAHINA LASKER

Self-made pages, warm whites, the patches.
"21 Oct 14."
A drop trips– soaking like cotton.
Sharp cursive, black ink, chard-charcoal in yellow lamplight.
Index trail down the grey stain– bottom of the page.
Waterproof ink.

‘WHO THE FUCK IS THIS GUY??’
Shuts the leather cover.

Darker walls, night, dragging away the yellow lamp, vast bed, almost to the edge of the entrance.

Two wooden latches.
Thud! Shuts night of the room. Corridor blasting in the afternoon's shine.

Climbing up– binding the flowing obsidian strands– tall bun.

Marching to the end of the third floor’s corridor.
Thud! Thud! Thud! On the door.

‘No one’s here.’ Ivory's raspy voice passes through the gaps.
Squeaky door.
Half hanging off the bed edge, ivory pooling on the floor.
‘No headache?’

‘..... Distrac..ting..’ Vaguely red the white pirate patch in its middle; purples swelled at the edges. Further saturated the bandage wrapped around the knuckles, open fists.

‘What if it leaks??’
‘Period window, Baji, worse leaks can.. Ahm.. happen.’

Sleeping legs up the bed in grey pajama.
‘What’s this smell?’ No prints on the bedsheet. ‘You peed?’
Everything’s white, or sort of.
Windows and walls.
‘Old cum stains.’

‘Hmm...m.. Get up.’
‘No.’
‘Ispara...’ Knee shake.

‘What do you wanttt?’ Sharp blonde eyebrows.
‘Who’s this Prithvi guy?’

Stretching her neck up– thighs slip, neck strucks the floor. ‘Ahhh....GOD KILL ME PLS!’
‘You threaded your brows??’
‘Scissors...Fuckkk.’ Palm on the head. Thinker's pose.
‘Don’t scream...?’
‘Baji, get out. Please.’

Finger taps on the bed edge. ‘Here..’
Crawls close. ‘Auh..’
Muddy and thin her strands, frenzied yet not pulling away. ‘Auchh!’ Not sticking out.
‘Do you have some oil??’
‘Yea..on the bed's drawer.’

Tissues, crumbled tissues, porn magazines, pens– coconut oil. ‘..Bitch.’

Shining silver the window glass.

Hard mattress.
A glistening thin trail, a handful and a few drops on the head.
Rubs the palm, a glass-like layer.
Fingers curl on hair roots.
Gritty scalp.
‘Who’s Prithvi?’
‘Yess…go down there, Baji, yes…damn thick fingers…’
‘Isparaaaa.’

Hmmgh ‘Give me a cig first…WHERE'S YOUR HOSPITALITY…’
‘I don't smoke… And this is your room!’
‘Needless…Needles? Pills? Anything?’
‘Shut up.’ Ivory hair, warmer shades with coconut oil. ‘Who??’

‘……wh-’
‘I don't know, my dear owl.’
‘Really?’
Nods the oil scalp.
‘REALLY?’

Groans– ‘Why are you…’ Swift neck crack. ‘…Asking?’

‘Nevermind…’
‘Yea.. Use the nails.. you're an angel.’

Empty walls. White coat on paint residue, buried canvas edges & tape lines.
Gone the girl in those thousand frames.
The red and blacks, black and pinks, others, various shades, in warm harmony.
‘Fucking, what's her obsession with cold baths???’ Sniffles.
‘Hey…’ Oil drip dragging down her forehead, the eyes more glistening, filled, trips a teardrop. ‘Hey, hey, hey… you ok??’ Stiff shoulders, as if only bones.
Sniffles, sniffles, sniffles. ‘I-donnnt-know, Baji.’ Hiccups.
‘She was almost gone, cold pulse, lay as sleeping….while her heart was giving up.’

‘Hey…talk to me…’
‘Never seen her this worse…’
‘Hey…come here..’ Dry shoulder, drenched hair– sharp arms. Curling her fingertips on the back.
Hurricane her sniffles.
‘What if.. if…i wasn't there.. I was almost not there…I don't be with.. there… what if..?…huh!?.. She's such a child, hurting herself..’
Taps. Back taps.
‘What if I was late?…if I didn't go.. I almost didn't go….. she's.. killing me.’
'Breath, Ish…Breath… I'm here…'
'That damn water..was soo cold..'
***

Afternoon stretching closer and closer to the threshold.
Koyals already hunted worms, singing, single notes, artistic whistle, going home.

Belly groans
White ceiling, grey patches, spider webs.

‘So many beautiful paintings… where they all go??’
Elbows push into the mattress, her sight straight at the ceiling.
‘Burnttttt… All to A-BLASH.’
Light slap on the hand. ‘Why??’
‘I don't know…’
‘Hmm…’ *Hm* Spit down. ‘She broke up?’

Still, staring at the ceiling. ‘Hm..’
‘Wanna talk about it??’
Straight face. ‘Nope.’

‘Hey…all ears when you want to…' Blood back in her fingers. Pinkish red.
Ivory nods.

Comfy, same material, light the giant cushion.
‘So who's that Prithvi guy?’

‘It was a crush of his…’ Stretching her arms. ‘A guy.. he liked.’

‘So..HE LOVED SOMEONE?’
‘MmHmmm.’

Eye patch slightly leaking. ‘Here..’ White dupatta on the red drop. ‘A guy…?’
‘Is it really surprising?’
‘..Kinda..’

Belly growls. ‘Tell me about this guy..’

‘He didn't tell me much. He liked him, but the guy didn't…’
‘He never told me about this…’
‘He was upset…as much as he was, tried to keep being himself. I was like if you can't lick the balls, kick em.’
‘Or move on…’
‘He did.. sort-of.’ Ivory sighs. Itching at the bandage sides.
‘Don’t scratch it..’

‘He kept…mm, you kept yours, like… everyone carrying life, like hidden from me..’
‘I’m carrying this headache, Baji….fuck you don't smell that? Cat puke? Bad kitty!!’
‘Take meds…'

‘Btw..’ Rubbing a finger on the blood stain, too bright on the whites.
‘What would you do…if you..hmm..have this girl you liked, but she had a husband and all?'

‘Damn…hm..feel this need to hide my hanging boobs..?’ Belly down on the mattress.
‘Fuck you.’
‘Haha… Kiddin.’ Returns the slap from midway.
‘And the husband is a little decent…ish so like, she just can't leave him.’
‘Kill the husband!’
‘Noo. Idiot!… something…reasonable?’
Ivory groans. ‘Being gay is not reasonable, Baji..’ Stretching her neck. ‘Is the girl good…Sexy?’
Breath takes its time. ‘Very.’

‘How she smells like?’
‘Like…’ Teeth grow on the tongue. ‘Nevermind.’
‘LIKEE WHAT!’
‘I said, "Never mind."'

No koyals.
Noiseless.
Fan's off.

‘You gotta tell me whom you fall in love withhh.’
‘I don't'.’ Sheet rustles. ‘It was hypothetical.’

‘Your cute.. hey look at me… Tell..pls’
Lovely her smile, like the dimples stretched through all childhood.
A half-painted canvas at the side of her desk, pink drips and empty space.
‘She’s married.’
‘So what!!’ Griping the back of the shoulders, shaking them.
‘So I destroy a family for a fucking feeling??’ Back slaps, hard palms.
‘It hurts…bitch..’
‘Baji?…’

‘Hm…’
‘Go for it..fuck the husband.’

‘Gimme..’ All brushed and brown, bandage trailing off, black the open patches, dry blood. ‘Why you jumped on that guy??’

‘No clue…’
Soggy the mass of the index kunkel– a nick, dull white the bone.

‘…Go for her..it's only awkward if she's fucking him too.’

MONEY PLANT/ NOOR KHAN

V.V

Noor’s eyes hooked on to particularly nothing but the lucid shapes her white blood cells making in her lenses.
Though the money plant is at the center– somehow only blurring boundries of the blue sky. Floating shapes like bean-shaped bugs.

Ahad’s crying, the quarrel echoing, but drowning Noor’s ears; static, white noise.
Damn narrow walls.
Noor’s daydreaming.
Dilated eyes, as if on a substance.
Noor Khan doesn't want any involvement in that discussion.
Her lips flicker voicelessly.
‘Not her again!! Don't I tolerate a discourteous, unreciprocative husband!?? You're a member of an elite kin now. You have a name! What more do you want Najiya?? I have given you a language, now your words matter.. No one remembers a Khan but they all remember a Lasker. Daughter of Noor Khan..they all are jealous!!
Jealous of your beauty..Of your NAME!..of your husband..
What you with again with your matterless facade? If your husband calls someone, talk.. it doesn't split the sky. INSOLENT! Always arguing–’

‘What are you mouthing??’ Najiya jostles her shoulder with daughterly restlessness.
‘….Easy! Child.’
‘Listen what this filthy man is saying to my face.’ Najiya scoofs and twists her nose away from her husband.
‘No..no.. don't be rude now, Najiya..he's your husband.’ Noor walks a very few steps and grabs a fixed wooden stool from her cupboard-like kitchen.
‘Please, have a seat, Damad ji.’
‘No need, Mummy ji, please sit.' Ahad’s nose red.

‘Aww..you Damand ji, such a gentleman.’
‘Ahh…’ Softly gasps, Noor as she sits.

Her wrinkled eyes abrasively settle at Najiya.‘Go on, Child…pick pieces of my brain..’
Shades bleed, cracked floor, dim spark of the lantern.
Taking too long to speak, damn girl with damn tears in those ducts.
‘Small narrow home. Home?????? A grave! Would die here… Will…OHH ALLAH…but you'll die in a mansion! And you don't appreciate!
Damad ji fell in love with you..a miracle! Allah’s miracle! Where would you be! If it didn't happen? Huh.. You don't know your best affairs child.. you're a child! This wealth, this name, this behaving…won't..ever slip in your lap again!!! Wish..wish Inshallah, Farook Lasker take my son into his factory.. he's a hardworking man…oh, he'll! He’s family now! We family now…
Free us from this prison–’

Daughterly jolt on the shoulder.
‘WAHTT??’
‘Ammi! Are you even hearing me???’
‘Huh!?....yes…yes..’ Noor digs her dupatta into her eyelines, wiping atomic existence of any moisture. ‘Yes! Child.. yes… but, mind this. Your father has cheated on me, four times, may Allah burn that man in hell. But I didn't leave him.’
Her soggy skin wrapped around Najiya's hands as she held them.
‘Because that's what women do! They sustain a house, a family, a husband! You have to do your responsibility, my child.’
‘Mummy ji…hmm..don't..’ Ahad sneezes.
‘This is rubbish!!’ Najiya takes her hand back. I'll talk to Bhaijan.’
‘You won't do such a thing!! Don't act like a child, Najiya, YOU'RE AN ADULT!!’ Najiya runs out.
A smile on Noor’s face. Najiya stutters for a long three seconds– mutated her daughter for big doors.
‘Mummy ji!! You upset her!’ Ahad throws the wet, nosy napkin to the side.
‘Oh! My apologies, Damad ji!!!’

AHAD LASKER.

Feet expending, in cue with lungs, after her.

Hem of her mehroon gown tight in her fist. Yet a portion ruining on the dusty road.

Knees ignoring every lazy ligament's clinging.
Marching down the road.

Joints rich in rust, sleeping lucidity.

Burning back of the heel without Kashmir socks.

'WHY SUCH HURRY….' Sprinting– down the road.

Down the road.

Her naked feet stickin' out, each step. 'In such fucking hurry…couldn't put your heels first??
Desperate breaths.
Stomach acid in the mouth, high school marathons.
Lengthy steps. 'Dont' fucking talk to me.'
'Ahhhh!' Feet stutters– kneels, holding her feet.

Knees down near hers. 'Let me.' Dirty ground below her step. 'Stop…'
Rose thorn. 'No worries, just an ant bite.'

One gentle snatch.

‘Ouch!’
Gently put the feet down. ‘Let me carry you home…’
‘Fuck you…’ Wide sleeves drifting in the wind. Hastening down the hill.

‘Listen to me plssss, Najiya.’
‘I said I don't wanna fucking talk..’ Storming steps, hitting heels on black tar, lonely road.

Toes curl and jumps out, catching her palm, fingers vining on the fist.
‘HOW..essh..leave me..’ Long strides to the side by soulless gully.
Rosy eyes deepen, the wideness asking questions.
Her back against a wall filled with rotting posters.
‘Just listen to meee..wouldyou!?’
‘Lemme..GO.’

Heads up, anchored sideways, grip loosens. ‘I never touched her…or anyone! You're my only one.. It is a misunderstanding! ..But..’
‘BUT??’ Sight charges directly.
‘You were distant.. Idontknow why.. I needed a friend..I..I. hmm..’
A tear leaks, runnin’ down, falling from her curly lashes. ‘You’re different now…’
‘Baby..how?..I love you.’ Runs the head sideways. ‘ACHHHUUUU!’

Steps upon steps.
Too eager to fly her mehroon gown in the grey wind.
‘Stop.. plss.. I did wrong.. I shouldn't have talked to her.. I shouldn't have texted her.. She started…an old friend.. I won't..make excuse..I’MSORRY!’

‘Breath…and leave me alone.’ Stepping away.
'I'LL CUT THE CONNECTION.' Sneezes. ‘I LOVE YOU, Najiya..’
Knees pop the sleep bubble. ‘I really do!’
On the main road.
Limbless the road not holding her steps- steep route towards Lasker Mansion.
‘WAITT…’

Fingers close and together in the palm.
Too huge the yard gate.
‘Your eyes, they got a lil…sorry.’
All the useless eye burnout, useless diggin’ pools, useless fill-up & calorine. Red corners.
‘What…’ *Hush* ‘These dogs can sniff my tears too?’
‘No, Baba, but they have eyes too.'

Tears on the linen sleeve.
‘I don't want them to know that you were crying..’
‘Yea…well stop now’
‘All good now..’ *ACHHHU*

NAJIYA Lasker.

‘And Mummy thinks I live in luxury..’
Narrow soundproof walls.
The door shut.
‘Tehreem Bhabhi looks so pale…Allah…hold her son’s soul.’
‘Hm..We can.. but…but.’ *ACHUUU!* ‘….But.. you wanted to live with the family.’

‘Huhhhsh…’ Emptying lungs; soft, coffin, the bed. 'Ain't I stupid?’
Soft sheets, sinking matters, the softest material there was: moth wings.

ACHHHU!!!
AACHU!

'No, wtf is that…?'
‘Whh-whatt?’ Snatched the towel like as its gold limb.
‘Something you're not telling me.. something… that is still making you panic.. still making you sneeze..’
“Najiy…’ *ACHUUU!*

‘DON’T LIE TO ME! DON'T LIE TO MEE.’
‘It's nothn..’ *AACHU*
‘It's all over your face…’

Flickering like a fish.
‘Noth–’ *ACHHHUUUUU*
‘Liar!’
Rapid wipes, red nose.
‘Allah..why you don't listen!.. No lies, I told you… I want shit like before, NO LIESS! Ahad.. don't hide from me!’

‘No…no…’ Falls down, ting, knees sink to the floor.
‘Ahad….what…wha..’ Stiff as rock. Face on high-heat.
‘Najiya…..’ Neck lowers.
Growling sniffs. ‘I saw him..there.. Before.. Before! The blood.
Before…before.. everything.. I thought.. I thought..If I tell anyone,
inform, report… fuck..they'll ask me how I found him.. you'll ask
me…why I'm…
They'll ask me….and then..I had to tell you…’ Hands heavy– metal-rust.
‘…Have..to tell…that I TOOK A GIRL TO FUCK..took this girl to fuck.’
Crawling eyes. ‘I don't even love her…I…shit-fuckk.’

Blurring eyes, ground like a flash slipping.
‘Get…awa-’
‘I COULD'VE SAVED HIM!! I COULD'VE SAVED HIM!! HE WAS LIKE
MY CHILD!! I LET HIM DIE!!’

V.VI

FAROOK LASKER

‘Eeshh.’
Petal tray in her hands.
Drawn the cup’s heat through the kitchen, hall, warmed up.
Three for each bite-sized cookies. ‘Too light on the biscuits…’
‘I knew you'd say this.’

The tray on the wide limbs of the sofa.
Tar. Empty Web.
‘Something’s wrong?…’
Palm wipes on the shirt sides. ‘This..weird smell…’

Hands white as the previous ceiling. ‘Probably nothing, come sit.’
‘Yea….’
Clove, distracting cinnamon, rich the tea brown.
‘Go on..’

‘Hmm.’ Braceful dip.
Tehreem’s smile. ‘Good..’ Melts the yellow biscuit.
‘Your fingers smell fine..btw.’
‘Hm…My turn.’ Warm, melting sugar, baked flour dust– sly lick.. ‘Hhe…
It's good.’
‘Idiot..’ Smiling like sunflower.

Second dip. Vavours up, mixin’ zesty with–
Tar. The rust and metal tar. Webs. VACANCY!
In the nose.

Uhmm Acid runs up the tongue.
‘FAROOK!’

Nose. In the nose. Blood, skin and salt.
Jolts the bathroom room, metal handle.

‘Aughhh!!’ Green as that moss.

Cabinet door snatches apart, shampoo!
Her shampoo.

Arm's length drench, glitter on the past red lines, black rose shampoo.
Dry floor, scrubber? Scrubber? Scrubber! At the room's edge.

Up and down the thousand shards of the metal scrubber, to the skin.

Tipping, a million drops, grey foam, skin, blood.

‘Farook!! Fuckin… FAROOOK!’

Smudges red her fingers on the wrist bone. ‘Let go….pleaseeee…’

TEHREEM LASKER

Slippery the blood! Fingers snatches and throws the devil's tool away–
'IDIOTT!' Tipping blood like water. Warm, shaky fingers.
Splattered the ratchet metal on the window, reds over green olives.
Eyes wrap up in wrinkles.
Wrapping the dupatta, evaporated his flowing iron in the cotton.
Creators on skin, past lines and new broad marks.
'THE FUCK!' Slap slips off the face.
Shoulders slam, knees lie and run to the window. Arms stretching for metal scrubber.
'Are you mad!'

FAROOK LASKER

STOP!!!

Stop! Please!

‘Fuckk fuck fuck!’ Planks puking red. ‘It’s not working!’
Toes slip in the blood’s familiarity. ‘FUCKKK!’ Punch drifts to the wall wide mirror– glass shards. THUD!
Pieces-pieces.
‘Farook!’ Falls a long shard.

Ancient grey wall inside the empty frame, shards around the corners.

Her muffled sniffles, on the floor, sobbing–
a shard on her thigh– reflection, her blood.
In air her blood– among the copper traffic.
Ruined her white suit, now almost all red.

Toes trip, slippery floor. In her feet. Thumb slits, as the silver pops out from her flesh, shatters.
Arms around her thighs. Wet shirt on the wound.

Holding tight. Her blood, such deep pierced the shard. Begging grips the palms. Soakin’.
‘He was here..in my arms. Covered in blood, tortured, beaten, Ra…. fuck.
‘I couldn't save him, Tehreem. He was…..breathless..Slipping through my hands.. Blood..blood is a very slippery object, Tehreem..my..my..hands covered..in his blood! To the elbows… you know how many times I bath?...It doesn't go away..’

Burning, her tears on the arms.

‘Ah..sorry, sorry..I couldn't save our son.’

V.VII

SALMAN LASKER

Metal handbrakes expending in the palm– sun’s present behind the sky doors.
Actively puking heat.
Sweat drops.
Beast on pause, grunting traffic murmurs.
Horns left and right, coal in the furnace.
Baldy melting like a dime.
‘I’LL GOUGE YOUR BRAINS OUT IF YOU DON'T MOVE….SECOND!!’
Cheap helmet– skinny pit-fuck doesn't know how to drive, shaking in the baby scooter.

Furnace– summer shades with trenching shadows. Unraining cunt clouds.

Flapping, pinning down wet cotton.
Forth button down of the shirt, salt drips to the wrists.

Wrecked like a worm, the fat truck filled with chubby logs, blond smoke out its hood to the black sky.
Driver wiping his bald head, on a call.

Narrow gaps sideways, wide reek, rotting fish gills, sewage, wedding’s trash– rude eaters, filthy Gov.

Fists all wet, dripping sweat, missing drops of some fat rain.
Fingers up on the fifth button.
Cotton screech. ‘Ugh.’ Dry breeze licks the back.
Breathing salt drops down the back bumps.
Spit on the side– *Screech* Nose plucked with the sleeve's dry patch.

‘MOVE!!’
Car owner honkin' drunkly, no chicks on the pavement.

HmM
HMhM Buzzes the black screen, sharp rectangle; against the wet ear.
‘WHO THE FUCK IS THIS?’
‘Your father.’
Huhh ‘Whatt?’
‘Go check on that boy…’
‘Why??’
‘To check what he remembers. Info and… info (Someone’s barking at the back, something about cigarettes.) And tell him what he needs to remember…'
‘Mmm…’ Cell back in the jeans.
Aathu Boots on the road, tires rolling back– a turn– kickstart.

Few pigeons, wide wings, side to side, crossing the road– leeches off the fish market and marriage hall from the back– leaping the fire front to the green fields.

Thrust roaring, wheels butter.
Beast exhales blonde puffs at 120 per hour.

Long— curveless— roads.
Fields, green fields.

Woods. Light-eating woods– submerging, summer hideout. A lady, doing voodoo?

Solemn straight road.

Begins steel railing on the sides. Urban white patches on the road, urban buildings– barristers, down red lights and beautiful women. Suits with straight faces and poker.

Wheels breathe on hour awaited curbs, city curves.

Fit shoulders and fat bellies, feet alive cause of the soil, sando wounded, hardwork & sweat– selling their hand picks.
Brown rice bags on the pavement, from beetroot to strawberries, peas, plums, and raspberry– crowd jam for cheap potatoes.

Monks buying garlic.

A suit, in his hand a red leash, tongue out of the goat– 'She only eats exported grass.'

120 kmp, blond puffs in orange winds– ALL SPICE – section, no coughs, sleeve filtering the chillies & cinnamon.

Road melting into the city's paws and bones, cars upon cars– bikes with no survival instinct, drivers wanting more sleep, jobs wanting more soul. Until pathology and rot, until limbs loose the notes– in an old Honda goes the dude, all wet in a blue sales executive shirt.

Old guy on the red off-brand, sitting in the back, mouth covered, meat flaring out, cancer-like cigarette pack cover.

Standing high— lights on in the afternoon.
Wide– getting wider. Shiny silver, Taj marble.

PHARM & MEDIC AID, LASKER

Gold letters, the twenty-two-floor white giant.

On the far left, the bike rest, big barn-like metal board– “FREE PARKING.”

Packed the first few lanes, usual.
Nasty midget off-colour bikes. Poor men affording cars.

5th lane, 6th spot, a tilt, Beast on sleep.

Huge white boards on tidy steel poles. “NO COST TESTS, LABS, CONSULTS.”

Clouds’ reign.
“BEST DOCTORS.”

Guard on the entrance sitting down, blowing his shirt up and down, catching air– air’s dense.
Open mouth, bubble cheeks, trappin’ air, for a moment or two.

Road’s not shy; vehicles smoking.

Dull crowd and slow steps.

Wide open the entrance, loaded biceps on the guard with an A.R. on the shoulder.

Pushes in the glass doors.
Murmurs-
Murmurs– tweets and coughs.
Breezy air alive and breathing, yearning on the skin.

Pills. Pills. Pills.

Tones- the medicinal smell doctors & pills reek of.

Minding poors with light coughs.

Sneezing rich.

Best dress the middle class drinking from RO.

A dent on that smile, a red bindi on the forehead.
Head tilts, holding hands of a coughing old lady at her side.
Dent, that wide smile, the moon, those cheeks.

They moving freely– shrink and rest the smile ends. Eyes oval and smoothin' over time– passing the phone.
Red sari, black hair.
Thin folds on the forehead, fingers moving with the vowels, telling something to the granny.
Emphasis at the end of each sentence, lips folding together.
'Hey…'
Heart knocking on the rib walls.

'Hm…Hey..'

Eyes up, a silken squint, raises her brows in reply.
‘Just… wanted to ask, is there any problem? With doctors? They treated you right??’
‘Ki?’
‘Hindi?’ Eyebrows as flexible as her smile.
Nods– flowing the two strands of ribbon down her ears.

Hands on the chest, ‘Me, Salman.’
‘Who..?’ Pupils expend on questions.
‘…Lasker, Salman Lasker.’
‘Oh…Thanu ThankU.’ Holding the palm, handshake.
‘Amar Badi-Ma onek oshustho chilo.. tomar doctors er jonno akhon thik ache!……Ami asha kori ei amader shesher bar ekhana…’
‘Hm..’ Nods. Signature in the air, the sign. ‘Your number??’
Smile softens. ‘Number?? Kino?..’
Lip flair, neck tilts on no cue to exercise.
Her glaring eyes- mountain lion climbing with puffy paws.
‘Mam..?’
In B&W, handing a white receipt– a small pill-filled polythene.
‘Oh.’ Quite many pills. ‘Dhanyawad, Bhaiya.’
‘Ok. Shuu now.’
Her fingers curl in calm, patting her grandma.
‘Show me, please.' This pill and that pill, Three free tests, one free scan, seven patches of pills, four thousand. Charge of the pills.
‘Hey…Don't worryy..’ Pen sign with the fingers, bill slides in the back pocket. Holding onto the palm.
‘Etar upor??… Ok..’ Turns, hands in her bag– red gel pen.
In her hands like a scalpel.
Her nail tips as red as her smile, roses.
Spilling the ink, desperate & thirsty the paper.
Ten red digits. Sharp lines.
‘Thank youu.’
‘Nahi..tor Dhyanwad.. bhalo doctors, kno paisa jama??’
‘No paise.’ Hands on the chest. ‘I’ll pay…’
‘Aww…ki bhalo.. nekhh dhanyawad.’
Stretches a smile, maybe as big as hers.
‘Dhyanwad, Beta.’ Strong hands of old age pat the head.

Slow steps to the entrence; fine white strips in her red sari.

Looking back.
Hands on the ear, fingers forming a phone. ‘I'll call…’
Chuckles, covering her mouth with the back of her wrist– passing to the door.

To the stairs.
Stairs.

Stairs.

whole wide world on her lip ends. The whole wide world in her lips end.

Stairs.

Stairs.

That smile.

Stairs.

The way reds folded around her face.
Moth wings, rose petals.

Stairs.

Whole wide world compressed on the smile.

Stairs.

Stairs.

Whole world.

Stairs.

Whole wide world.

Last step.
Toes curl in the boots.
Head of another corridor.
Chimes the lift, a boy and an elderly person in the wheelchair.
‘Which….Floor? it??’

‘Floor!??’ Sharp vertical ache on the shins.
‘Thirteenth.’ Heading on the way.
‘That lift fuckin' workin….’ *Huh* Short breaths.

Plan walls, steel doors, noiseless. The interior from toe to head, cyan, like toothpaste.

Walls closer, tunnelling into the corridor.
In red font, “Emergency.” Axe in the glass box.

Room O-4

O-5

O-6
Each room almost identical.
No ticking, ting of metal, human skin or sour wounds, light the air around these rooms.

O-7
Something bloodish.
O-8

Blood's dry; moisturizer settled freshly, almost wet.
O-9
Knock. Knock.

No creek, no screech, scratchless the noiseless door.
'Sir!' Guard on the other side.

Bandages, oval, used more than a whole bundle.
Red undertones around the hairline.
'Go away...'
'Yesssir.' Old leather steps further– away – a turn, cheap shoe-shine light in the air.

White like a blurred halo, walls, the sheets, wrapped below– bandage even on the collarbone.
Heartbeat up and down– Ticking like a mechanical clock.
'You awake???...' Mannequin.

Knock, knock– bed shake. 'Himanshu!'

Half the window closed, curtains tension-free, billowing.
Red tank, at the left corner, pin free, *SESSH* some air remains in the fire extinguisher.

Thud! Metallic Thud! On the bed edge.

‘Oi, BANDAGED BITCHH!’

‘Hm-h.’ Arms crawl, handcuffs cough. ‘WH…..MMM…H…’ Jitters, a dry cough on the legcuffs.

‘Sush..don't stress your throat more than I need to.’

‘W…mm…W…EH..WHO?’ *Hhhh!*
‘Salman Lasker.'
Jitters.
Jitters thale lobster.
‘BEHAVE!’
‘S..ee, I, I, I…’
‘Clear sentences, Boy.’

‘I did-n't kil…kill… Ur..broh..I didn't…any!thiinng.
It… Am..zat..’
‘Huh??..What?’
‘Re–han’s…bat…I, I,.. only went… My brother! My brother!! I…want him s….safe. Red undertones around the sockets. ‘Believe.. me!! I not!’

Pacing, highs on the heartbeat route, cliff pace.
‘Beli…..e-’
‘Sush!’
Bandages shrink in the sheets.

Cell out, push on the metal door.
‘I got something for you….. at the hospital…. THE HOSPITAL…. in a blink.’

Clouds climbing the yellow sky, air sluggish, growing cold. ‘In a blink…’
Shut, screen black.

Mixing together the layers, transparent dents, and details.
Rumbling, low-fuming thunder.

Huffing, clinging to the stair sides.
‘What…what you.. oh God.. you want to show?’ Marathon-breaths.
‘Where you taking me??’
‘See for yourself.'

‘Who?? Turns like an owl. ‘You did this??’
‘Nahh..and this is the guy who saved your neck, Officer.’ Sniffling in silence.
‘Go on, boy.’

‘Mhm…Am..’

‘Wait…’ Wet in his sweat, cheap bleach. ‘You might wanna record this.’ Nods and skips steps – cell at the edge of Bandages’ pillow.
‘Go on..’

‘……’

Officer's face wrapped like a mummy, skin shrieking, fingers smearing the salt drops. Clenched jaw.

Wiping eyes– ‘Hm…. Any…thing else?’ Cheeks- nose bridge.
‘ I..I, I…cant..kan…kant.’

‘Can’t believe.’ Officer gulps.

‘CAN'T huh!!?’ Red tank on the gritty face mold. THUD!
‘AH!…’ THUD!! THUD!! *Crack* *Crack*
‘THATS! “ALL!” HUH!’

‘HUH!’
‘HUH!’
YOU CANT!?!’
Puddle. Red puddle.
Squelch *Squelch* ‘THATSALLLHUHH.’

It slips– *TING* On floor the extinguisher.
Warmer drops tipping off the fingers.
‘Congratulations, Officer, you solved the case.’ Dripping down the face, chest, arms.

Stained boots off the floor. Copper drops down back bumps.

Hushh
HUSHH

‘Everywhere fucking.. curtains, ceiling, floor, sheets–
EVERYWHERE!....’ Long breaths, one at a time.
Puff the lungs with air.
Just as Dad taught.
Breath.
Bhagban… sank the bandages, flat…
Beep *Beep*
‘Monster, blood-covered monster…
Monsters all they… poor boy..fuck, fuck, fuck… What? What? What?…
Need to clean this…need to send search party… Amzat khan…Bhagwan…’
White oulines of the phone, all blood, buried white. Brain, on the black screen, heart monitor, wall.
Ugh!! Spilling guts.

Body acid, gut water and blood, tiny floor trails.
Beep
Beep
Flatline.

PARKING OF THE SECTOR SURVEILLANCE.

V.VIII

‘I'M HONOURED! To tell everyone, in front of me, listening, watching, near or far….’
Puffed chest 'front hundreds of faces.
‘But Mr. Shri Charan-’
‘Let me finish myself young lady, wherever you are..turn down your mic.’
Cough. Cough. ‘…My officer has proved himself once again. That is how hard-working he and hundreds are in his supervision. My supervision. They are here to protect our homes! To protect our people! Our families! To avenge the dead! I'm delighted that the justice is served. Delighted that my hand-chosen officer, Vikram Raj Prashad, has achieved the impossible. And I'm sure that all you citizens of my colony will be delighted to hear what he's achieved by the man HIMSELF!’ A big hand– the crowd joins– reporters' hands stuffed. Rails Shri Charan further above the held mics and cameras.

A proud tap on Prashad’s shoulder.

‘A thousand people, whole ground, whole ground– even on the far fences, for once the parking’s filled. A dozen mics; Son’s dead, brother safe, forced sex– it was the worst, confirmed. Rapists weren't from only one religion; Salman Lasker, drenched in the blood of the innocent, made me a witness. But, fuck…how he made a worse shit unfold, Salman Lasker, made the rapist caught; no more civilians missing, no more, NO MORE!!!’
‘You gonna say anything?? Mr Prashad?’
‘Hm!??...yea…’ *Hm-Hmm*
Thousands of people– elf ears, stretched & wide.
‘Hm… Caught, yes. Criminals – monsters! – of Aakansha’s case and of her schoolmates. Himanshu Rajput, a boy of our town, confessed against players of his cricket team. Even after threats of harm against him and

his younger brother. Brave boy didn't hesitate. He didn't stutter. We're making sure his brother be safe.
Himanshu Rajput has lost his life, by the monsters that polluted many our daughters.....and son-s.
Azmat Khan. Satyam Rajput. Balband Kumar. Junaid Ansari. Zuber Khan.
Has been euthanised while they tried to take a foot off the town.'

No sounds in the ear canal, buried the buzz. They are opening their mouths as if screaming, jolting their hands as if they can grow.
'I'd make sure no such drastic act of ugliness reoccurs...'
Breath stubs in the nose. 'Families of the victims, visit, and get details further, and collect, we encounter remains of a few victims.'
They are yelling, they saying something.
'....All the girls... and hmm... All the victims... May they rest in peace.'

ISPARA LASKER

V.IX

Silent the wooden door.
‘Maybe be soundproofing…’ Najiya 100% masturbates.
Dirty shoes of Ahad Mamu, sweat of a mile.

Breeze paving through the way– empty and precise.
Extra brown, the furthest door, sun carvin’, zig-zag rays.
Opens the gate, blue suit, tall mermaid. Nose blend as a potato, no notes of her shampoo.
Eyes damp, sinkin’ dark. Only lamplights behind her– eyebrow lifts.
‘Hm… May I..’
Eyes roll. ‘Come in already.’
‘Thank you….’
Sniffles. Opens the window, breeze.
‘So M’lady…what's up??’
‘Rotting on the bed…nothing's new, Ispara.’
‘Copying my hobbies…I see…’
Falls on the bed, face side, on his pillow.
‘I don't know when I learnt.' Muffles.

‘Looking good here.’ New glass and border, matt black. Mixing with the painting. Fresh–the black colours, oil on fabric.
Sniffs. ‘Let me see..’
Shifts– bandage on the right foot. ‘I should replace it, clean the wound??’ her eyes, green and black at the same.
‘Oh.. No..needd..’
Looking good in the light. ‘Now the wall looks bareable…full..’
‘Yes. Thank you…’ Shifts her hair- sits, holding the pillow.
‘What Mamu said??'
Eyes frown, arms tighter on the pillow.
‘Hm?’

‘Aariz…was…hmm…’ lashes long to the ceiling.
His smeared in black, looking down. His eyes–
‘In the worst of outcomes… worst… Idontknow.. I imagined all the long fucking nights..maybe.. maybe not.. but I'll listen the details if you need to spit them out…’
Close her arms, cloak around– sniffles.
Fuzzy, long hair, black roses– black roses.
‘I miss him, Mumani.’ *Huhhh….* ‘I miss him so muchh.’
Arms, winter's blanket.
Huhhh…. ‘I miss him sofuckin’muchh, Mumani…every single day..’
Hiccup 'Every evening….' *Sniffle* 'Every step he took with me, every splash of paint we threw at eachother….'
***

‘Hm..I was thinking hmm..’ Fingers on the bandage knot– slow pulls.
Itching the knuckles.
‘…so what about that cat boy??’
‘I told your Mamu.. to reward him.’
‘Cool.. That's cool…’ pulling it out, in circles– red in the last circles–
‘Allahh….Imagine if the boy got scared away and didn't tell his father.. my boy would.. Allah… How would he be found then?…’
The last layer. ‘Esh…’ Skin’s taking its time.
‘It'll take… it's time to heal…wait..’ To the side drawer.
‘He has his place, Mumani…don't worry now… he's found..’
‘Sush…show me your hand.’ Her blue dupatta, hydrogen peroxide… it burns. Bubbling the upper layer.
‘Life was good when you had red hair.’
Chuckles, gentle rubs on the smeared redness.
‘Aariz was still a kid.’
'You were a kid, Ispara… feels like yesterday.'
Chuckles.

Sniffle. ‘Talk to me… Ispara, You mustn't…Himanshu… what happened to him..’
‘Hm…..It does feel like tho…hm..you know-’

V. X

MOTHS

Blinds wide open, moths joining at the dinner.
Warm candles on the table, wax dripping.

‘The press, really? Was it necessary?’ Salman chews on a big bite of biryani.
‘Yes.’ Bite in place. Before Farook's mouth.
‘Tasty.’ says Farook, licking the finger. 'It's so tasty, Tehreem.’ Finally came back from Dr’s– whole hands covered – mouth open.
Another bite.

‘Who told you to kill him!?’ Salim’s fist slams on the table.
Salman’s eyes wander up. ‘You??’
‘In what world, what I said mean permission for a massacre?' adds Salim.
‘Oh, you choose your verbs wisely..’ Grin climbs on Farook's face.
Ear pinch – ‘Ouch..Tehreem.’
‘Bad salman..have some punishment, give me your biryani…' mutters Farook. ‘How he looked afterwards?’
‘Oh…stop.’ More rice, bigger bites.
Big bite cardamom and cloves. Looking sharply, Tehreem's eyes.
‘Yes.. would you all shut up.. talking about this ugliness… at supper??’ Exhales Ruma.
‘Yes… No point in any of this!..’ Chews the bitter bite.
‘End this now. We need to leave it all behind.’ Echoes Shezad’s voice.

‘What would be going on with his family, all suppers without their son now on.’
‘Let's not ponder foreign bitterness.. my son got blood, Oh Salman.. Bow your head to Allah, Beta..’ Nehruma chugs down two glass.

‘Bitterness is bitterness, Baji, ours or someone else's…’
‘Rubbish!… Stop the thoughts, right now.’
‘Give as much thought as you like, Teh…’ Moving to the ear. ‘Just one more bite, pls…’
‘She’s right… we must personally compensate the boy's family.’ Sniffle.
‘Absolute right, Sahina!’
‘Shut up, Farook..’
‘Have peace now! Supper in silence!’
Moths fly to the window on Shezad’s voice. Red wax on their tiny legs.

V.XI

BAMBOO FOREST

Sky melted with bamboo heights, the same light devouring shade –
sweating bamboo shoots, warmth– moisture and hoot–
An owl hooting somewhere close.
The bamboo forest is infamous for centipedes and nail-eaters.
Darker the silhouette of blood-drinking bats.
Open sky with a million stars, bamboos close, like a cave.
‘Your jeep bending the bamboo roots, bamboo forest is sacred, you know….’
‘Shut the fuck up. And only answer when I say so, in my ear.'
Fancy phone, touch screen, calling someone- in all leather. No heat for rich folks.
Call running. 'Please answer, already dialled three times…he's getting mad!…Fuck..where I found myself.’
Call runnnnning–
‘There are ten more people who speak Bangali…but, but, fuck.. this is good luck!! He'll pay me as much as I can ask!! A thousand per word!! They drain money like sweat. Sure, sure…PICK UP! SHE FINALLY PICKED UP.’
‘Speaker, speaker.. put it on speaker.’
‘Sush!’
Slightly shook his finger on the speaker icon.
‘Hello.’ A girl's voice, soft & high.
‘Hi..’
‘Kno?’ Eyes glare. ‘Means “Who?”
‘Remember…Hospital??’ Using a soft voice.
‘Ohh…Ha, ha, Salman, na?
‘Tai na.'
“Right?” Awfully clean his ears, no smells.
‘Ha, ha. You english??’
‘Hm…Little Little.. buchte but bolte kothin.’
‘Said, she can understand but finds it hard to speak it.’

‘Oh, no problem, same. I can understand you, but…dry mouth.’
Distorts her voice– ‘Hm jsoomakshd.’
‘What?? What happened?’
‘Singla dikkat kre, exdam, bahiyat.’
‘What she said??’
Hm ‘Cursed her signal.’
‘Maybe it's not your signal, I'm in the middle of a jungle.’ Biting his spec's tail.

Hoo-Hoo Hooting the owl, so specifically, it's not noise calling cadavers. ‘Hey, Salman, man….hmm…I'm not feeling well.’
‘Sush..’
‘Achha… tahole etake prothom dekhatéi bhalobasha bolte lojja pachcho keno?’
‘Said, "Then why do you feel shy calling it a love at first sight?"
‘Im..not shy, it's just, I wanted you to hmm..name it..it was so abstract, like a rainbow, you know.’
‘Haan haan, rongdhonur moto.’
‘Said, yes, like a rainbow.’

‘Bhagban Ma’s alone at home, and here these two have not a drop of sleep in their eyes!.. Is it worth it… it is! But…’

Distorts her voice– (faded steps.) ‘OMG, Ma uthe geche mone hoy… pore kotha bolbo, Salman. Take care!’
‘You tooo, take caree…’ Line beeps.

‘What she said??’
‘Take care, and she'll call later..’
‘She said something long!…What she said??’
‘Her mom seems to wake up, and she ran..steps, she said she'll call you later and told you to take care.’

Fuckk…’Are you also seeing those..those eyes!!!’
‘Jugnu, Dweeb.’

Glowing in an atrociously fixed manner. ‘They are fixed asfuck..at us..eyes…’
'Don't pay attention.’
'Let's get out of here! Pls!’
‘Hm.’ Jumps to the driver's seat.
‘You need torch?’
'Fuck you.’ Clicks the key sideways. Engine roars, vibrating surface of the jeep. ‘Tell me..how it went?’
Buttoucks clinging to the second seat. ‘For a first time? It was hmm..good.’
‘If only you didn't go frozen time to time, you skinny spit fuck..’
‘Nor just skinny…I’m also broke…’ The only good thing, gears changing to speed.
‘Teach me Bangla…and you'll be rich.’
‘Bet.’

FAROOK LASKER

V.XII

Hollow steps piercing through muffling darkness.
Moons at the end, at the right window, sparking the white curtain.
A tap on the desk lamp. A swing on the window latch.
Billowing air.
Lonely book racks– black entrance. No following steps.

Fingers shaking, bandage gritty.
Esh One tap on the “home” key.
'Begin, boy...' *Distortion* Voices emit from the speaker.

‘What are you doing?? At midnight?’
Caramel.

‘Hm...Nothing, Teh....’ TAP! Tap! Tap.
Fingers on heroin. Finally paused at the fourth tap.
Enters in the lime-yellow light. 'What was that sound??’
Hands bend back, stretching slits beneath the bandage.
‘Nothing.. nothing...’
Thud. Down–
'What's that?'
Nothing! *Ahhh* Grab, forms the fist.
‘Give it to me.’ Long strong arms. ‘What is this?’
Four hands, messing fingers, mumbling voice– ‘It's ok.. be easy and confess, son.’
‘Whatt??’ Fingers frowning, curls.
‘Tehreem you're hurting me!’
‘Take your hands back...Idiot.’
The bandage screeching against her long pulls.
‘Stop! Give it to me..’

‘No!’ No nails yet! ‘Leave it, Farook.’
‘Give it back!’ *Ahh!* Trembles her steps.
‘Farook..are you mad!’ Crashes cell onto the desk; lamp tilts.
Forming giant shadows, tug of war.
‘Stop it, Tehreem.’ Arms around her’s. ‘...Please..’
‘No..’ Jolts her hand, bends and snatches– it away.
‘Don't be a child! Give it..’ Hastens up and back... ‘Tehreem..’
‘Watch it...’ Flies shut back on the desk again.
‘Lettmee..’
‘No..’ In the arms.

Her palm on the face, pushing. ‘Twhremm.’
Ahh
Lossens gripping skin. ‘Are you okk! Tehreem??’
‘Baby.. moving..’
‘Sit...sit... don't move...’

A grey, palm-sized moth, hovering– sits on the edge of the cell's screen.
Tiny black eyes looking at her.
‘Are you ok?? Tehreem..’ Warm her palm.
Climbing her index. 'Tehreem, don't..'
.‘..Shut up.’ Quietly presses on the middle key.

‘IT’ll only make your pain..worsen...’
‘Sush..’
*It..hm..beginSs way befor..thIs, Idonknow them, don't...when. ThEY force me to be.. criket, criket... I pLAY... cauSe Cause.. LITTLE BROTH!! same school.. said, woold harm him.. Sav! Mah...broth–BrotheR.
Get to the point!
Fingers tighten in her palms.
ThEy done it... PREYd, rap.., Stalkk.. Ur broh, killed, They...they... EY told me, OtheR..gurls, they, rape... Ur broh..Bhara...t..tawaj
Bharatwaj? Who the fuck is that..
Speak! Can you speak!?.
‘I can't....cnt...kant..’

* Rapid steps, distortion... metallic thuds*

You can't!! Huh!' 'Thud!!
The bandaged arms run, clogging her ears. Blur, sight, only yellow hexagons.
Ugh The cell flunks off of the window.
Echoing out Salman's screams.
Warm rub, her eyes on the shoulder. 'Take me far, Farook... Away. I want us away from all this...please, Farook..'
Sniffles. Sniffles. Drool running down, unclogged the nose.
'Ah..' Widens her eyes. Tears, peridot.
'What...'
'He moved...'
'Baby...'
'Yea..'

V.XIII

27 Oct, 15

Feelin incredibly dirty, dry blood, like ass leak... hmm Idk... If I didn't beat his shit...he would still be alive.
Idk why I beat him... he broke her heart...but why I blind him?
I didn't stop.. even when Pallavi kept yelling..kept.. forcing her heart..
I didn't... I don't wanted to....to stop.
I'm the problem..
I caused that...there's no running from that.
But...In a way... fuckk.

Akansha was Riza's friend.. what she would be feeling right now?
Justice? Karma delivered?
Should I call her?? Fuck..no..
Mom's missing dad... it's in her dilated eyes, clear asf..
but she had connection.. Riza hate. Or really good at pretending that she does.
On the balcony when I went her home...went back as if I was black plague. She didn't say my name, there was nothing in her eyes...except a need to go away. Her eyes never felt this shallow before.
First time i couldn't answer why I love them.
Cause they as big as her tits? Probably.
Nancy gettin sick.. puking more and more.. I ain't buyin her meds... fuck it... it's not cause...fuck Riza. Maybe God exists.. maybe... I just should thank to the cat of that boy, who found Aariz. Thanks.
You prevent my brother from rotting, more than God already allowed.

PART SIX

VI.I

NAJIYA’S BROTHER'S LIVING ROOM/ NAJIYA KHAN

Free air, walls without noses, space enough for a sofa– bed bigger than a sofa.
Little mutters keeping cousin sister Rajni busy.
‘You really want divorce from Ahad?’
‘Fuck him!!! You aren't listening…are you?’
‘Of-course, Baba…. Talk to me..go on.’
‘It was so fucking…’ *Hush* ‘Seeing him…IN KAFFAN!..Again…Allah.’
Blur, sobbing eyes.
‘Don’t cry, Najiya. I can't wipe your tears from here.’
‘Hmm…hmmm.’ Soft wool sleeve trapping tears. ‘They were so bad, everyone except for him, maybe because he was the one who spoke the least to me.. but his eyes didn't have that shaming shine, you know..poor kid.’
‘Yeah, yeah.’
‘Wanted to cry my lungs out– I did. So much cries, mine were… they were holding his janazah on their shoulders… How can they? How can anyone hold a janazah of their family???? ALLAHH..for a moment it felt like, it looked like… I'm witnessing Bhai and Papa taking Eliyaz away from me!! Again!!’
Sniffles — ‘Don't cry…. don't cry, Najiya.’
‘Taking him away from me again.. same height, same… fuck.. wrapped in white… He was so pretty, that sharp nose bridge… Those kajrari eyes… at the age he would've looked like Aariz… Allah took him sooo soon!’
Sniffles ‘Najiya..hm, listen..I need to get Pinky ready…for school..I'll call you later..’
‘Huh…hmm yea..yea…’
'Don't cr–’
Beep.

Black screen. The phone lands on the bed's edge.
Eyelids on top of the eyeballs. Anchors tied to the lashes.

No black, chard or charcoal.
White kafan, silver bier, ivory sky.
Blood absorbing like wine on that eternal veil as his face scars bleed.
They got him already bath, then a second, yet, the leaks.
How could Tehreem Bhabhi ever forget that?
Torn their throats, mother and sisters.
Allah, same as Eliyaz, why did you take him so young?? So young.
“Doesn't move a leaf without my intervention.” Then why the fuck you make Ahad, go. Why did you kill Aariz? Why didn't you save Eliyaz?
Wrapped both of them in white.

Kitchen nearby, boiling milk on a low flame.
'Allahh…Allah..give them Jannat…give them Jannat..take their souls, keep them close to you.’
Teeth on tongue, lips against cushion.
'Ahad must accept the divorce. HE MUST!'

VI.II

ISPARA LASKER

No bustle coming from that way– unusual.
Stood there the rocky institute, like a small castle.
Three possible ways in this trailless field. Steps turn, following the flowing ivory, to the right.

Winds bending the everlasting shining grass on this inconsistent bumpy soil.

Green as far as the sight goes.

Two fingers in, Ivory removes the boots; fingers remain hooked, holding them in the hand.

Lips stretch as greenery ticklin' the soles.
Skin reading the texture of the leaves, skipped by the eyes.

Highlighting precociously– the yellow lustrous.
Horizon is made of carpenter's brush, one broad stroke, no details, liberating.

Passing the Oldman trio, three huge hundred-year-old trunks– a million branches.
Carpet of soggy yellow leaves.

Colder the concrete– dry ice.

Grey the path to the basketball court.

Empty, the net's shaking, free.
There– sitting in a white polo– on the left, wide concrete steps.

A Goldberg between middle fingers like a child–
Wavy black hair on the wind.
The eyes, exactly how he drew– almonds, corners dark.
The eyelid sits over, puff like a cashew.
'How was the exam?'
Coughs. '..Bad..' Voice rougher.
Hush 'It smells like shit..'

'My brother killed your friend.'
'Not my friend.' Exhales– nasty black smoke.

'Your lips really got that purple highlights...'
'Hm..what?' Raising brows.
'Lipsss... Have you seen anything he painted?'
Spits to the other side– 'He didn't like..showing hobbies at school.'

Around the time, court used to be full, kids crawling like bugs to dunk the ball. No one's scared of an awful tan.

Smacks his lips. 'I guess you.. believe that I got him killed?'
'No..'

Sight at the ground.
Vacant ground.
'Feels peaceful, No?'
'Nahh.' Ash flies in the air. 'Are you here... to torment me?'
'Oh, no no. No.. I carry no hammers.'

Bacardi, cheap kind, the good kind.
Lemony.
Stinging right amount of taste buds.

Leg stretch, fingers to the jean's pocket. ‘Try this one.’
‘Nah.. I'm good.’
A flick to his cigarette– flown away.
Asking questions, his eyes.
‘Try! It's cool..’

Holding between his fingers– spinning. ‘Quite long.’
‘That's what my girl says when I put the strap on.' *Click* *Click*
Sparks, mother's silver lighter.
Folds into a pout– nose exhaling ivory vapours. ‘Cool shit.. as you said.’

‘How do you feel?’
‘….Conflicted.’ Smoke out, leakin' through his nose.
‘Any of my brothers..hmm approached you?’
‘Nope… Not yet.’
‘Don't worry…they won't.. I made sure of it.’ Catching the smoke.
Fills the lungs.
That soothing warmth.
‘That Bharatwaj guy tho….’
‘Roamed around me.. pal of the fucking..’ Quick breath. ‘Other friends…
No clue why he did…what he did…’
‘Hm..’ Vacant ring. ‘You shouldn't feel responsible…’
‘It’s hard…’

Marching black clouds, mushy wet air moisturizing the nose.
‘He was moving on…said to me, “Stopped mentioning him in my journal.”

Hush ‘I’m sorry about your brother.’
‘Hmm..’ Fingers stretch for the cigarette.

Long puff. ‘He was too much.’
‘Haha..right.’ Ash drops midway.
Lemon. Lemon. Good shit. ‘Annoying even..’
Better with the Ebony smoke.
‘Yea…hardly ever respected any bounds.’

Chuckles. Holding the bottle. ‘The last time…I approached him, to you know, to end all that awkwardness, say sorry…whatever. He didn't let me finish. Said, “Don't bother, we were always past apology and forgiveness.” Holds the cig. ‘What the fuck that means…??.’ Quick puffs.
‘And dying before explaining is such a bitch move.’
‘Totally.’ Cloud of smoke.

‘You…got more of this shit?’ Tosses the filter bud at the ring.
‘Lucky guy..you are.’ Ivory slips the hand back in the pocket.

The cig between his teeth– *Click* Sparks. Sharp inhale.
‘So you're not into basketball anymore?’ Clears his throat.
‘My coach died.’
‘Isn't he alive?’
'My dad, Dumbass.’
‘Oh…sorry.’ Quick sips.

Cold wind. No trace of noon.
‘You got a girlfriend?’
‘What??’ Taking the cig.
‘Hmm.’
‘She’s pretty?’
Cheek sucks, big puff. ‘Yea. She’s pretty.’

‘Good for you..’
Nods his head, similar current as the breeze.

Zesty as fuck. ‘Last bottle?’
‘Last..’
Fuck. To the hoop– trips on the last inch, shatters on the ground.

‘Hmm.’ Bag off the shoulder, zip down. ‘I want you to take a look at this.’
A frame. ‘He made it for you..his last piece of art.’

Exhales, eyebrows squinting. ‘It's nice.’ Bud in the air.
‘Oil on wood.’

Stands up. ‘This picture was my PFP…a while ago.' Arms stretching back, fingers running off the portrait. ‘Why, Prithvi?’
Stepping down.

Turns, squinting eyes, the dark corners. ‘His feelings are buried with him…mine will be burnt with me.'– Steps continue. ‘Love is not something you can give, Ispara.’

'Cremated…'
Pauses fake Jordans.
‘He wanted cremation…'
‘Ohh.’ Head trails– turns, avoiding eyes– carrying on with his steps, looking at the sky.
Black clouds.
Empty the court; free the hoop.

‘Take care!’ His distant voice falls on the right ear.

Like a tornado flew around, making a mess.
Lemon, Goldberg, Ebony, still in the air.
Ivory strands freeing from the frenzy bun.
‘Fuck…’

A lonely landfill, the block list, one contact— turns empty.
Cell against the unfolding strands.

On speaker, the Islamic ringtone of her number, a high-pitch choir.
Always sounded like her own voice– line's slowing.

Spitting out. Screen locks, ring mutes– thriving, phone's vibrating.
Goin'.
Goin'.
Goin'.
Some fucking folk song.
Beep *Beep*
No pick up– no answer, screen sleeps.

Teeth clenching against the tongue.

Far the ring, empty– in the middle of the court.
UGHHH! launches shoulder– past the metal net, shatters the glass frame, sits the portrait in the net.
Thud! Hits the pink cellular phone onto its back.
Slipping glass shards.
Beeping the cell.
Two dunks.

VI.III

SAUHANA LASKER

Vacuum.
Blinding as space–
Fingers featherily let go of the edge of the extra-thick oak door.
Levitates palm– search for the switchboard.

A thin slit of luminance escaping the vastness of her thick mehroon curtains– and that's all there is.
Knees praying to the dark, as they skipping.
Metal screeches on the metal pole; curtains shrink to both ends.
Drowning splash of light.
Her ochre eyes settled where the tiny spark was leading.
Naked body, poorly covered by a sparking white sheet. Making crumbs of shadow, her back folds.

No one's allowed in her bedroom- as per usual.
Long alive hair going far back down her glaring eyes– to the other edge of the bed.
An obsidian waterfall.

Sight sinful and neck jolts, body slithers, the elbow hits– the glass drawer. *Ah!*
'Go away….stop staring at me…' Through the pillow, her voice.

Grunting the rain clouds. Running birds.
Thud! Knuckles on the window panel. 'You have no care for me!'
'Go..away, Sauhana.'
'I can't let you rot here, Baji.'
'Then it's a fucking YOU! Problem… not my problem.. deal with it elsewhere.'

Something hit the glass drawer. Shivers of the glass.
Clouds stuck on black, that summer shit, throwing tantrums to cry, 17 Feb 2012.
‘I miss Papa, Baji….His hugs.’
‘And him…him…who will listen to me??? NO ONE DOES..’ Gasps leakin' directly through lungs. ‘I don't know how to deal with it…’ The jute of the sleeves rubbed like sandpaper. ‘I don't know to….how to..first Papa and now Aariz.. I don't know how is that even possible. Allah doesn't care about us?’

Space. Space.

‘I..I kept seeing their glimpses in front of my eyes as if…they are..I'm going mad, Baji.’

Tears burning at the eye lining.
‘All these smells! The oil paint, his comb, his oil still in the air.. IT'S SUFFOCATING! I know we all smell that.. why you all behave!?…Idontknow..how to deal with it..’
Knuckles on the window. ‘I don't know how to resolve this sinking feeling of my chest…’

Her head at the same place, the crumbs didn't move from her back– obsidian falling in the same direction.
‘I’m alone, Baji,.. I don't wanna be alone..BUT NONE OF YOU KNOW HOW TO FEEL IT! COLD HEARTED!
WORSE THAN PAPA, AARIZ! NOT HERE EVEN WHILE BREATHING!!… I can't sit with this.’

Thud! Oak hits the door frame.

SAHINA LASKER

Left– the window open, air and luminous.

The bedsheet snow-white, the same as the chest heights, leakin'.
Dripping, the heroin side-effects. Fingers push, contraction–
Drenching, shard-like drops.

Shoulders twitch as a cat rips the cushion's cotton out– fingers curl
around the syringe and the cushion flings to the window.

Low swing, teeth latch on and snatch the long needle's cap.
Fist thrashes in the thigh, pierces in the needle; not one drop crawling off the skin.
Thumb pushin', the amber drainin' in the blood.
You have no right on me
Blinking eyelids.
'Sahina, Beta–'
'Get the fuck away!!' The empty syringe hits the oak.
'Get lost…get away…Evryo..n.e..'
Don't touch me

Space. Vacuum.

VI.IV

JEEP/ VIKRAM PRASHAD

High-calibre Jeep, on turbo. Definitely crushed some turtles down the dirt road. Sogginess is spreading the more greens are approaching.
‘Death by…. that thing? Focused like a stoic on the wheel, Salman Lasker. Maybe a life sentence is more cruel; maybe killing is. He would say euthanasia perhaps.
Getting darker the greens as he is piercing further in the forest. What if he attacks me? I'm a witness, but then who would clean this fucking Lasker mess…’
‘Life in prison for these animals??’
‘I want justice, Officer.. no crumbs of butter.’
His right arm slips down to the pocket, picking out his cell.
‘Here…rocord everything we know… everything.’
Slick, expensive electronic. ‘Why?? Aren't we supposed to destroy all evidence?’
‘This is gift…for my sister, she deserves the truth.’
Is this really a good idea?? Salman Lasker does gifts.. not a delight delivering gifts. Whatever.
'Just do it..'
‘Hm.. so, on October 20th, Aariz Lasker disappeared from an evening walk. Apperently…’
Poking a finger on the shoulder.
‘What??’
‘Go as things happened.’
‘Ok..’ A big breath. ‘On 22 October, a beggar boy from outside the colony reported to his father that he had seen an injured boy.
The shepard father goes to the place, the vacant apartment at the edge of colony's 5th half.

He, in fact, saw the boy, your brother. The father called Farook Lasker, and Farook Lasker called me. He was, in fact, there. Hmm.. upon asking, the guy told me that he was able to recognise, cause your brother had a ring on with his name in Arabic. We searched the place, found his clothes, apart from his body..
‘Don't go into details.’
‘So..your uncle, took the... deceased and we took care of the evidence-’
‘BUT DIDN'T DO FUCKING ANYTHING UNTILL WE MADE SURE!’
‘We searched.. and..and did our job as best.. well..you know we tried. We saw the colony chief’s CCTV, and caught these two boys, Amzat Khan and another fat kid. Due to lack of evidence, we were about to release them, they confessed nothing and carried no, hmm, anything... but your brother forced me to keep him in.
'YES, I DID.’
‘Which God-willing, ended up being a good decision.
Two-three days passed and nothing happened. We kept the search up, interviewing schoolmates... Your uncle is a notorious being.
‘OI..’
‘It was..dead end. But, then, your sister, I presume... beat the shit out of that Himanshu kid.. who later at hospital confessed to your brother that he knows who killed your brother. Somehow your brother made a sensible decision and called me instead of acting on his impulses..’
Fuck, motherfucker almost hit that tree. ‘Easy..on the wheel!’

‘So the guy who revealed to be the goddamn monster, was forcing Himansu to be in his cricket team, other members confirmed. Amzat Khan and others who had this gang going on, who pick a target and later do atrocious things with them and kill them. Your brother, Mam, unfortunately fell under this gang’s radar...due to this guy, Bharatwaj, a classmate of your late brother. Before his death.
‘Baji, I made sure that cunt felt pain before he died!’
‘He revealed that he himself said to Azmat to harm your late brother cause he was in love with his friend, someone called Prithvi. He maybe not worth the revenge, Salman said... to me said that he was unaware and Bharatwaj wasn't his friend. I hope you'd tell your brother to keep out of more violence. This thing, I don't know if it'll help or not..but I

I couldn't deny that you and your family deserve to know the truth. I hope it can be easier for you guys... Rest-'
'Enoughh.' Slips it back in his pocket.
'Might rain....'
'It's waterproof...'

'You could've used a lot of less fuckin' words..
'You said, she deserves the truth...'
'Yea... she does.'

'Anyway.... It's deep enough.' Forest's breathing.
'EeYeah..It's deep enough?' Salman's rigid boots press against the break.
'You really want your sister to hear that?... Revenge... she'll be happy?'
'Happiness doesn't exist.. only loss and whatever opposite.. no loss... glimpse of past and past lives.'
'You killed the methaphor...perhaps..'
'Not the only thing I'd kill.'
Ugh Wet red soil. The shoe almost slipped. Huge variety of trees, each one tall.
'Oh, don't frown, Officer, don't you kill the ticks from your cat's back.'
'Yes...' Gets off, looking at the back, slides out the sledgehammer.
'GET THE FUCK OFFF.'
Jumping on, one by one, cuffed all limbs. Essh– one hits its jaw on a rock, crying like a roadkill.
Fuck!!! Sliters the face in the soil.
Fuck how heavy is that hammer.
Quite at once– all.
The sheer force. *UGHH*
SQUELCH The hammer, wide as his shoulder, melts its face.
'FUCKK..SALMAN... IT SPLATTERED EVERYWHERE!.'
'IDONTGIVEAFUCK.'
'UGHHH..!' Turn.. leaves, sight tryna' crawl on the branches.
Leaves, green leaves.
Eardrums shaking. A ladybug, red, NO! The seven black dots. Black.
Black, Head of the hammer. 'Ughh.'
Pouring out gut water.
'AHHHHHH!' Crying one of them.

THUMM! Silence.
Bones mushing, wet sponge.
Cries.

One by one crumbling– the forest getting quieter. REDER.

Steps away, munching wet soil. Red, everything red.

Broke into a laugh, a hysteric laugh– not his.
‘I find this more funny, Son,' utters Salman.

'...Pathetic fool, changing nothing...HAHAHA, your brother!
HAHA...YOU KNOW WHAT I DID! HOW MANY TIMES-’
UGHHH!
Thud!! Hits a gravel. ‘AHHHHHHHH!’ Amzat’s scream.
SQUELCH

Forest’s quiet.

Salman's huffling. Tripping red drops from his hair.
Pooling blood.
Yuck A creator at the crotch. Head melted. *UGHH* Pool of blood.
Greens. Greens. Focus on the greens.

'I'm leaving.. Hop in if you want.’ Drenched, all red, whites tipping off his face– spits at the side.
'Now what?’

‘Dead meat, let it rot.’ Salman throws the hammer at the back.
UGHH
‘STOP FUCKING PUKING.’
HMM... Palm shoves against the mouth. ‘OK..ok’
A drop hits the black dashboard.
Few.
White crumbs.
‘...You might wanna wash your hair.’

‘Shut the fuck up.’
Drops and drops, shower.

Finally, the muzzle.

Shri Charan doesn't care; he wants all Laskers out, no charges, untanned, corrupt fuck. This isn't an official encounter. It's not… vengeance.’

Blinding pure white rain as the jeep reaches the colony, stopping at the station.
‘Hopefully, I'll never have to meet you again, Officer.’
‘I'll pray on that.'

SALMAN LASKER

Overflowing empty roads, nothing but whiteness, bowed branches and drowning leaves.
Jeep parks outside, closed yard gate.
Hits the shoulder as he rushes through, jolting the gate open. ‘Bhai! Sahina…’ Nehal runs inside.
‘What??’
Yellowstone sinking like quicksand, flooding the boots. Thrashing off at the entrance, feet and denim drenching wet, inside out.

Cries and knocks are coming from the upstairs. Thumping door, the echoes of high-pitched sniffles.
Squeaky steps through the hall to the second floor.

A circle around Sahina’s room. Wailing, Sauhana, Mother Nehruma.
Neha's feet red, not stopping kicking.
‘WHAT NOW?’
‘She’s not responding, Salman.’ Runs Saniya, holding the wet hands.
‘Open the door, A-S-A-P.’

Hammering steps down the stairs, beyond the sinking front, to the jeep– sledgehammer firm in the hand.

‘Back up!!’ THUD! Flies off the handle. 'Fuck!' Nehal kicks it wide open.

The window’s wide open, white– Her hair lying on the bed. Sleeping?
‘What??’ Limbs sinkin'. Hammer falls, ladies rushing in.

‘ALLAH!’ Cries of Mother. ‘SAHINA!’

‘Whatt?’ A cream-shade glimpse and now a wall of backs. ‘Get away!’
‘Bhai..stop.’ Nehal’s holding the shoulder.
‘Get off me.’ Elbow to his long neck.
Pushing them away. Mother has fallen on the floor.
‘Sahina…’ Lay still. ‘Baji..’ Relaxed head, unresponsive.

‘QUITE!!’
Unclothed skin.
Folding the white sheet around. Holding the palms, carrying in the arms.
Marching out.

VI.V

28 Oct, 15

Idk why I dialed her number. I don't want to talk to her, ever, ever again.. fuck Prit and fuck her. Love is not something you can give and meaning is not something you can make, life is a cat and my cat is dead.. Rip Nancy, may she go to heaven if it exists.
She puked all over the bed, laying like an angel.. looking pretty even at death…I don't think ppl could say that about me.. I'm not doing this or anything for her or anyone, not even myself, or Papa….there's nothing I want, there's nothing I can get. I have everything.. and somehow…my room's empty, white chalk.
I threw off the fan, the bolt scratched my wrist, it's bleeding.. lol.. ppl crying downstairs, still mourning? Damn.. or something happened.. Idk… I don't wanna know.
I made rope out these curtains, room smells like carosine.. fuck you dad.

ISPARA LASKER

Ivory shuts the diary's cover, letting it sit on the wet, drenching desk.
Scoots the wooden chair to the bed's edge.
Blue drops are tipping off the nails.

Wet, shining skin in hard red leather. Jolting air swinging outside the wide-open window.
Ivory strands coming to the eyes.
Sparks, red and yellow; Saniya's silver lighter, holding Ebony in a pout, the white smoke– leaking through the nose.
Lungs fill to their bounds.
Ivory throws the lighter, it bounces off the leather of the diary, settles on the desk.
Fills the pupils with warm shades, galloping fire on the kerosene puddle.
Red-N-Yellows, slippin' like an avalanche.
Jumps, boots near Nancy, hoop in the neck, fingers glide the knot down.

Climbing onto the red jacket, burning the pores- leg off the bed, a dunk to the floor.
Teeth clench on the cig bud.
Echoes curtain like a whip– ivory sky, rain clouds– raining.
Limbs down. Flame catches on the lashes. Leaking Ebony smoke through the nose.

'Ispara! Ope……' Mother's voice, lullaby-ing the distortion.
Muting sirens–
Water filled the ears, summer lake 2012.

Another whip strikes, louder, wetter, wind reverse flow and countless drops. Cold is the rain.
Thuds on the door.

‘ISPARAA!! OPEN!’ Saniya throws her sharp shoulder on the door, opening it shut.

EPILOGUE

22 OCT 2014

I have painted this picture more than I could count on my fingers, and each time my fingers wanted more. More attempts, more symmetry, more colours, more precision, more Prit.
Looking in and out for hours, before the acrylic dries, before the sun shines. I don't intend to look at any other picture like this for the entirety of my life.
Pour acid on my eyes and pour them, those blacks would make his portrait, not my synthesis.
From my memory, as I remember him– seeing him weeks ago at the school in Nikes, that a girl gave him. An unfathomably generic feminine perfume she uses.
Anyway–
Wavy blue jeans, black hair, and greys that made that bitch wet her leggings.

The edges of the image I'm talkin' about (his recent Pfp) dissolves into black, swallowing his right cheek and his ear,
and the side of his neck– an unusual humanness, in the midst of this darkness, you can perfectly guess and see his right skin tone; the darks doesn't dull his skin at all. He's an athlete.
And the silhouette remains,
letting you imagine their shapes.
There are subtle highlights in his hair, almost purple in colour.
The strands like thriving obsidian,
falling on the left side of his forehead.
Something about them feels peculiarly cute.
The formation of those strands, their slight abstraction, resonates deeply with me.

A faint shadow, like a wash of a kind of white charcoal that doesn't overwhelm.
Runs from the start of his moustache area– (though he has none) down to his chin, suggesting he’s freshly shaved.
A vein faintly traces under his chin, leading toward the hollow of his collarbone, where the light fades into darkness. Pores, visible, crowded by a trimmed beard.
He might find his nose obscure, but his nose is small, almost perfect, slightly straight. The upper lip catches a thin highlight shaped like an "M", which I've only seen on him. And his lips– sharp. Yet like a charcoal smudge around the edges.
Magnetic, he wants to make me cut the corners of my eyes; when he talked, I listened, zoning out of all mental fasaad.
We had good discussions.
His lips appear in this picture thin, carrying a faint sheen.
In real life they are more kissable. The lower lip is slightly fuller, reflecting light in small patches.

The soft smile, when combined with his soft, weary eyes, conveys a sorrow that no one else can recognise, except me. Just me.
His eyelashes are long and dark.

The whites of his eyes are barely visible, the corners shaded in mehroon undertones.

He's looking downward– not fully, but enough to make his brown eyes appear almost black, edges mixed with the shadowed shade of his pupils.
His eyes are made by some God perhaps. Perfect.
Artists call this shape ‘Almond eyes.’
But almonds are too cheap to compare–
I won't compare until I find a RICH, similar shape.
Impossible.

There's no visible ivory in his pupils, but I know it's there and alive.
His gaze, mixed with that small, subtle smile, radiates a melancholic beauty that feels deeply personal, as if only I can perceive it. Only I can perceive it.
His hair blends completely into the darkness, an obsidian shine.

Except for a few stray strands near his left eye and across his forehead. His face tilts slightly to the left, not entirely straight, and a dull violet hue lingers around his eyes and eyelids. His eyelids are heavy, carrying a solitude so deep it emits loneliness.

That loneliness feels atrociously attractive to me.
Making me look.....hmm. I didn't care before, kept my fingers close to me, they didn't reach before. Why now? Whichu tell me?
Down his chest is puffed, push day pump, a highlight on his left pec, the brightest stroke of the photo.

I'm sure we're taller in another dimension. You said, chopping hights on this one. We aren't small. How can we?
Turn around, you fool, and tell me why I can't move?
Trying to hide and bury, but this heart always seems to pump.
Pump? I suck at poetry. Of course.
They long to be you- be with you.
Close to you. Close, close to you.
I love you more and more. I don't wanna let you go. I can't say....I can't say.. directly to you...Tell me why I can't...
I know you'd say no. And goodbye, or whatever the fuck that follows.
I won't say goodbye, I won't insult my love.
I'll decay. It's hard to remember that there are places to go. Are there places to go?
I'll.....fuck it.
But as I want...for you, I'll leave you forever just say so, I won't follow you forever.
I'll vanish.
I'm a comet.
That's what I do.
Spending each day with your palette, memories & photos, please go to graduation with me. We'll wear Nikes. Or anything on trend. Or something just entirely for us. Why is it so easy to take it from anyone else?
With you, I recall things being bright & pink, with you, everything lasts, and I'm able to see the future first.
Seconds never turn past.
All it feels incredibly present.

Recalling feelings, they are vivid like last night.
I recall you don't like your old Jordans.. fuck shoes. Who gives a fuck?
We can get anything, just say so, anything, anything, like anything,
fucking anything, you deserve everything... you deserve me.

But after a while, I recall you and see that...maybe you're right, you're not mine.
All I accumulated ended up being an annoying sales.
I'm a fool.
Fuk... whatever.. I'll leave. This is the last mention.
Though after all, I recall...
Through the brief hums and replies you shed,
you never called me by my name...it's Aariz Lasker.