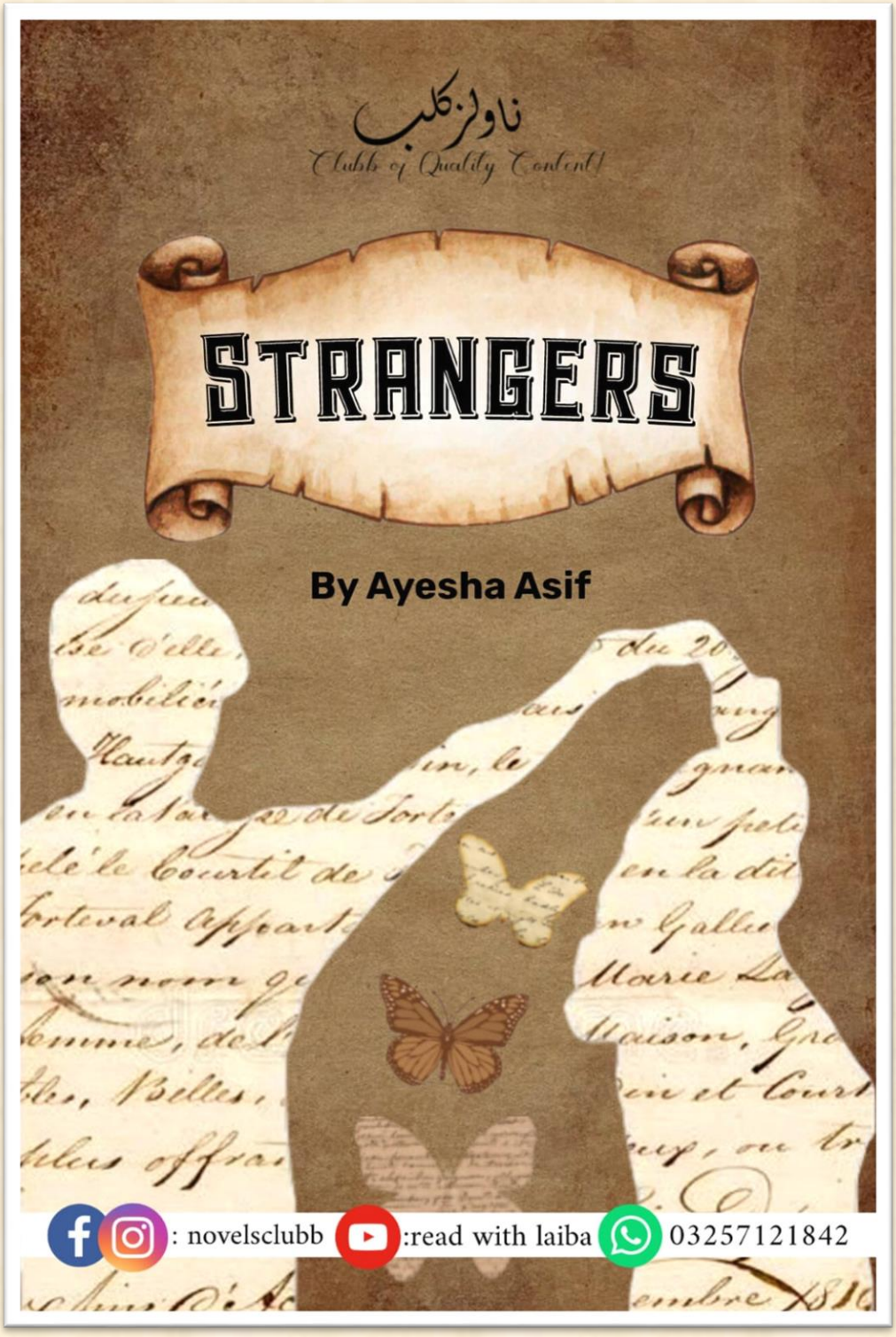
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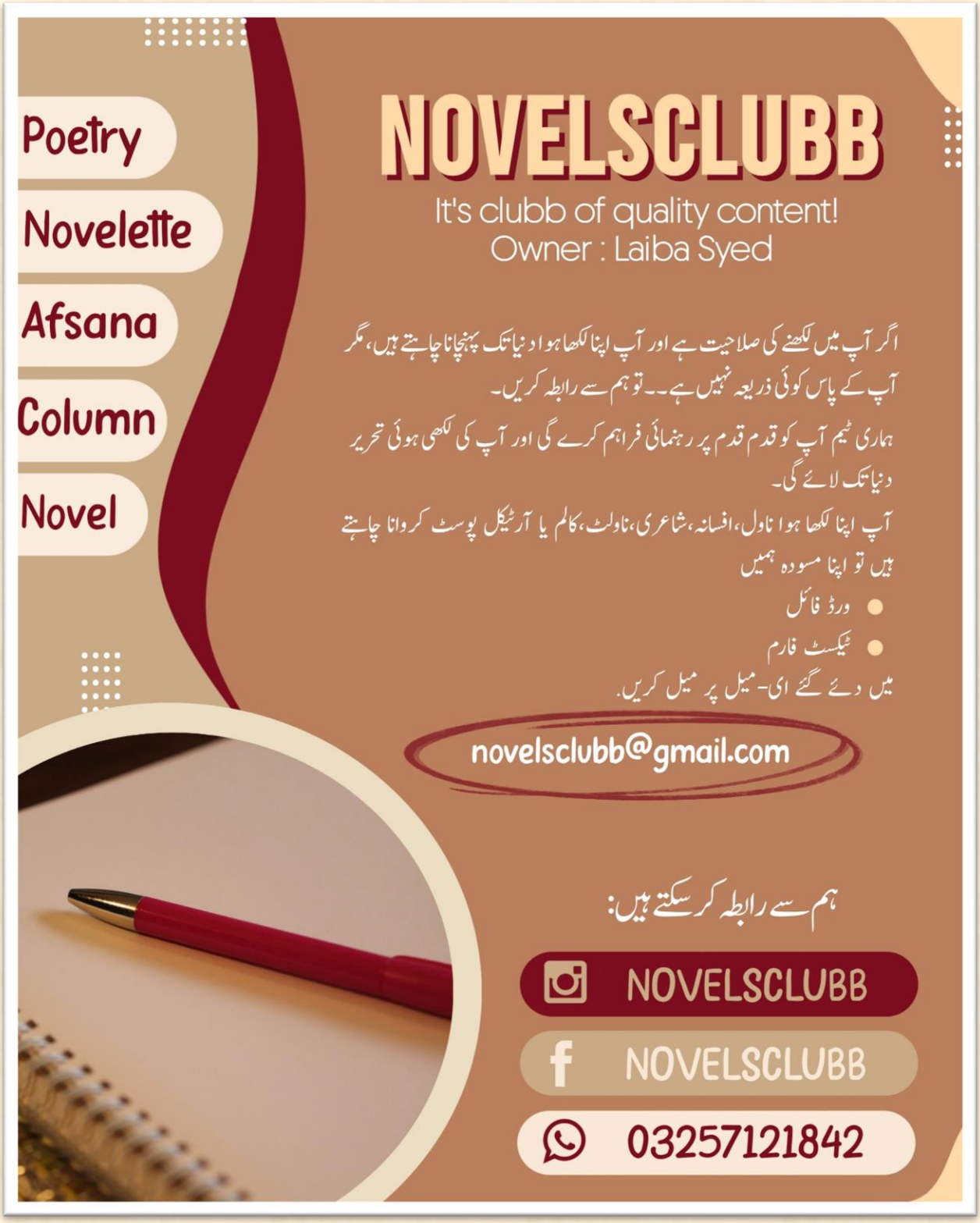
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اگر آپ میں لکھنے کی صلاحیت ہے اور آپ اپنا لکھا ہوا دنیا تک پہنچانا چاہتے ہیں، مگر آپ کے پاس کوئی ذریعہ نہیں ہے۔۔تو ہم سے رابطہ کریں۔
ہماری ٹیم آپ کو قدم قدم پر رہنمائی فراہم کرے گی اور آپ کی لکھی ہوئی تحریر دنیا تک لائے گی۔
آپ اپنا لکھا ہوا ناول،افسانہ،شاعری،ناولٹ،کالم یا آرٹیکل پوسٹ کروانا چاہتے ہیں تو اپنا مسودہ ہمیں
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Strangers

By

Ayesha Asif

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Clubb of Quality Content

“STRANGERS”

Written By: Ayesha Asif

“Hameed uncle, where are you? Shehzil is not there, let’s have coffee together.”

She excitedly run towards the café while typing a message on her phone. But then, she suddenly stopped in a state of shock. **“Who are you?”** She felt her lips moving and saying this. The tall guy standing in front of her wasn’t Mr. Hameed. He was somebody else. A stranger! An unknown person! Anonymous! She came back from an illusion of her own thoughts and re-enter into this world of reality. Amazement was now decreased in ratio expectedly!

“Ahh! I’m sorry, I thought Mr. Hameed was here! Sorry again.” She was about to turn back and run from here when a voice distracted her move. “Well, if you don’t mind, we can have a morning coffee together.”

“No sorry, I can’t. I need to go.” She abruptly spoke.

“Why?” The new guy asked impatiently.

“Because you are a stranger to me.” She turned back and ran towards her car. She opened the gate and settled down on the driving seat. “Stranger! A cool stranger! Wasn’t he? No way, why am I overthinking?” Like every other fantasy girl, she was talking to herself.

“Stranger! Oh! Not a bad entry by the way.” He whispered.

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He was sitting in a meeting room, just when his personal assistant (PA) entered the room with a tablet in her hand.

“Sir, Ms. Miral has landed today in the morning.”

“Good. What about the workshop in Canada?”. PA left the room after providing all necessary information. He picked up his phone and dialed a number. “Where are you Ashar?”

“Dad, I came here for your work, it’s almost done.”

“Good. Miral has reached Karachi.” He spoke in a serious tone and then switched off his phone. The person on the other side of the call was excited to meet Miral.

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“Tall and dark. I don’t know much about him. I just went to café to meet Hameed uncle. He must be thinking that I am such a foolish girl.”

She was laughing hard on what she said earlier. “Are you serious Miral? Tall and dark!”

“Oh please! He’s just a stranger and nothing else.”

“My dear, your eyes can’t lie. Another entry in your favoritism list by the way.”

She couldn’t answer her but deep down she was still curious about that one “Tall and Dark”.

She had been driving whole day from airport to the café and now directly here at the library spot where her friend, Shehzil used to work as a librarian. “Miral, are you serious! You didn’t go home; you just came here to tell me about that guy in the café.”

“Home! There’s nobody waiting for me at home. Don’t call it a home in front of me again, it’s only a place made up of bricks, cement and other materials. While, a home is made up from a family.” There was a kind of heartlessness felt in

her tone, like she was a broken soul, an incomplete version of herself!

“But what about Ashar? He must be waiting for you Miral.”

“Ashar Fareed.”

She spoke in a tone full of love and then finally decided to leave.

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She was standing in terrace when she felt the smell of roses. “Oh, so you are here! Mr. ideal. My dearest brother.”

“I can never surprise you, never. You are now no more innocent Miral.” He hugged her sister.

“Never mind! I can always feel your presence Ashar. These flowers, red roses?” She took the flowers from his hand and smelled them.

“Accept my apology, I couldn’t come to pick you from airport. I’m sorry. I’m guilty! I feel like, I am disappointing you just like others.” A guilt on his face appeared.

“It’s okay Ashar. You are here with me, that’s enough for me. You don’t need to apologize from me at least. You can

never disappoint me. Never be guilty again Ashar." She was looking in his eyes.

"Did you meet Dad?" She gave him a mug of coffee.

"Yes." Then, took her hot coffee mug.

She turned back and look at the sea waves which were in a constant action of moving forward and backward. "How's your job going on Ashar?"

"Don't ask, it's giving me much tough time." He took a sip from mug.

"Why? Any issue?"

"Corruption. That's the only issue." He took another sip from mug.

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"Oh! But I know my brother is not a corrupt person."

"How can you be so confident over me?" He was looking at her face but she was looking at the waves.

"Because you are the only person who I love the most in this world. I know my brother can never be dishonest with his profession."

"Miral, I know. But this company 'Artistic Holding', whatever leave it! What about dad?"

“I don’t want to talk about dad, please!”

“Miral! But he’s…”

“I’m feeling tired. I’m going to sleep.” She moved towards those flowers, picked them up and went towards the stairs. She immediately turned back and spoke in a tone full of love.

“Thank you so much for these lovely flowers and good night Ashar.”

He smiled while looking into her deep eyes and said;

“Goodnight my dear.”

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She ordered her favorite black coffee in the café. It seemed like she was waiting for someone.

“Miral.” Somebody called her from behind, a known voice.

“Hameed uncle.”

“When did you come back Miral?”

“Last week. I visited your café too but you weren’t present that day.”

“Ahh! Miral, I sold out this café.”

“What! But why?” she was shocked, surprised and astonished.

“I am shifting to Islamabad, near my daughter Faiyya. You know better. I don’t want to live in Karachi anymore.”

“Oh! I can understand. But who’s the new owner now?” Her shock was now transformed into her deep curiosity which grew even more. “You must tell me uncle; I would have purchased your cafe.”

“I’m the new owner of this cafe.” This was the time when Miral couldn’t believe her sight. That view that she was witnessing right there; that moment that she was going through; she couldn’t believe. She couldn’t forget that face, those deep light brown eyes and a spark in those light brownish eyes. Unbelievable! Unforgettable! That ‘tall and dark’ was standing in front of her and was telling about him being the new owner of this café. Impossible! Unexpected!

“Miral, he is **Zaid Jahangir**, the owner of this cafe now; he has purchased my café.” She was unable to figure out that what to say next.

“And Zaid, she’s Miral, our regular customer.” Mr. Hameed happily introduced both of them. But was there need of any introduction? It felt like they knew each other for a longer time period. This unexpected meeting was just a formality to be fulfilled;

“Oh! Our regular customer. Glad to meet you, Miss Miral. If I am not wrong, you are the daughter of very famous businessman, ‘Mr. Fareed Awan’, owner of **Artistic Holding**?”

Miral came out from a trance and answered him proudly, “Yes! I am Miral Fareed Awan. Nice to meet you… Mr. Zaid.” She came out of the café and settled her breathe. One, two, three; Relax Miral! Relax. Smile wasn’t disappearing for even a single second from her lips. She drove the car and went to her next destiny where she used to find peace in atmosphere, in all her happy moments and even when she used to feel stressful too.

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She was sitting in her car. She was relaxed and excited too. Her breathe was in control. Why am I excited? He's just a restaurant owner, that's it. She was at sea view; she didn't move towards the sea waves. But heart was crazily dancing out of excitement. She got out from the car and locked it. Today, her heart's desire was something else. She was going near the sea, when suddenly a cold sea wave touched her feet. She was holding her sandals in one hand and cell phone in other hand. She opened the camera of her phone and clicked an aesthetic photo of the sky. She uploaded that picture on Instagram's story with a caption; "Obsessed with the sky."

She came back home at night. She directly went into her room and after changing, she was standing in the same terrace with her brother 'Ashar', the most important person in her life. They both were gossiping and crazily laughing over something. They looked happy together. Miral was showing him something from her phone.

Far away, in the balcony, Fareed Awan was standing and looking at his children, his world revolves around those

too. Despite, having every blessing, money, power, fame; he couldn't make her daughter satisfied. He couldn't rejoin his broken family. He couldn't make Miral believe about his unconventional love. He was a father. He never expressed his love and affection but deep down he loved his son and daughter. But there was something else that were even more important for him; off course, money, power and his multi-national company 'Artistic Holding'.

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"I need to prepare that assignment. You know free lancing is not easy at all. I am going to café. Just come over there if you can." She was parking her car. Then, she entered the cafe, her laptop was in her hand but suddenly, she stopped. He was focused. He was typing something on his laptop when he felt that somebody is constantly watching him. She was walking slowly towards the corner table, settled down, placed her laptop on the table.

"Here is your brochure Ma'am." She looked up and smiled.

“I don’t require any brochure; you know I am a regular customer.” She smiled and proudly spoke, looking straight into his light brownish eyes, that ‘tall and dark’ guy.

“Oh, I see! How can I forget my regular customer then? Ma’am what will be your order then?” He smiled back and gently asked for her order.

“Black coffee!” She opened her laptop.

“Anything else?” He left the table but turned back again and asked her.

“No”. She was busy in her typing now.

“Continue your work, your coffee… black coffee will be served in five minutes.” He left and she raised her head and saw him going into the café’s kitchen. She smiled and engaged herself again in her work. “I need to complete my assignment; I don’t need to get distracted. Please, no distraction.” She spoke to herself.

Right after five minutes, her black coffee was served by a waiter.

Miral looked at her coffee and then look up at that tall guy who was just few footsteps away from her. He was

discussing something with a waitress. She took a sip of her black coffee. She completed her assignment and now it was time to leave and go back home. She stood up and pack up her stuff. “Thank you for the coffee but the waiter didn’t give me the bill.” She went to the Mr. Halil (Restaurant’s manager) and asked for the bill. Just when the tall guy appeared unexpectedly. “You don’t need to pay the bill today. It was free for you.”

“Free coffee! Can I ask you why?” She was looking straight into his deep light brownish eyes.

“A small compensation for our regular customer. That’s it! It’s only for today, Miral.”

“Oh! From Miss Miral to Miral, just in few days! Aren’t you going too fast?” She spoke in a wicked speed without even thinking. A constant smile wasn’t leaving. He laughed hard and only said; “This is our third meeting; I don’t think so that any formality is left between us.” He left saying this and she lowered her head. She stared at her white high heels for few seconds and then turned towards the outside door. “Formality! Seriously!” She settled in her car and

tried to comprehend those words which she heard from that 'tall and dark'. She looked at her phone to check the time. "Oh no! I am getting late! Tonight is..."

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She was wearing a white flowery, designer top with a navy-blue skirt, wearing a beautiful pearl neck piece, a beautiful diamond ring in her ring finger and light blue colored square heels. She was looking fabulously awesome and was perfectly ready for the tonight's party at her own house.

She looked around for her phone and just then a notification ringtone attracted her attention.

"Miral, where are you? He's here! Your tall and dark guy!" Shehzil's message notification was shining at top of the notification bar. She read the message several times. "What is he doing here?" She asked herself. "Just coming." She replied and turned off her cell phone.

A last look at her outfit, makeup, jewelry and everything else in the mirror. Everything was perfect like her. "Miral, you look perfect." A compliment for her own self. Every

compliment that you give to yourself are much important and has got deep impact on one's personality. Last touch-ups and then she went downstairs. The massive garden and poolside of the house were greatly decorated with shiny, bright lights and flowers all over. She was meeting all the guests when she felt the smell of roses around her. She knew who had brought those roses. She knew those red roses were for her! She turned back and smiled with pure heart. **"You look pretty, my princess."** He gave the roses to her as usual. "Ashar! Thank you for the roses again. You always brought these roses for me. What will I do with these lots of flowers?"

"How can I not bring flowers or roses for my dearest sister? You are like a rose to me, you deserve flowers and beautiful flowers, my little princess." She laughed. **"You are precious for me Miral, remember."** The purity in his intentions was being demonstrated through his eyes too.

"I know and I am never going to forget that, Ashar. Now go and attend the guests. We'll talk later." She

whispered in his ear. He laughed and after handing over her roses to a maid, went to greet the guests. Her eyes were searching for that 'restaurant owner, the tall guy', just when she saw Ashar meeting him. They both were shaking hands and it seemed like they both knew each other for a long time. She couldn't go there because it was awkward for her to join Ashar and his friends. **"They knew each other!"**

She was now holding a drink in her hand and was standing with Shehzil. "Oh! Zaid! He's the new restaurant owner. Miral, why don't you tell me before!" Shehzil was surprised. Well, she was staring at Ashar and him. Ashar was still with him 'Zaid'. He also saw that she was seeing them. She moved away from his sight as his dad was calling her.

"Hey Miral, majorly our fourth meeting tonight." Finally, he complimented her with a very unobvious comment that she or nobody could expect. Everybody had been saying her that she looks fabulous! Her dress was awesome. Some of the brand conscious ladies from the elite class asked

about the brand of her dress, jewelry. And this guy was mentioning about the number of their meeting. How strange! Absolutely, he was strange! Couldn't he give a compliment like others, like normal people. Stupid! I don't need his compliment! Anyways! "Hmm... I wasn't expecting you to be here." She was trying to read his face or maybe his light brownish eyes. "Really, nobody has expectations from me! Anyways, have a good time, Miral." He was about leave her when she loudly spoke in a curious tone; "Do you know Ashar? Ashar, my brother!" There was something in her tone like she was inquiring something. "Ashar is my friend. Anything else you want to inquire?" She felt uncomfortable because of his tone and words, and without uttering a single word, crossed him and could only spoke; "Excuse me!"

He kept staring at her footsteps till they disappeared. "You will always escape from the climax situation Miral." He looked at 'Fareed Awan', he was busy in his circle, around the people like him. He went outside and then directly out from the **'Awan House'**.

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The party was over for her! She came into her room. She settled her fast breathe. One, two, three; Relax Miral! Relax. **(Anything else you want to inquire?)** Those words were heavy, the tone! “I am just over thinking!” She went to the change her clothes. After being fresh, she came back to her bedroom. She couldn’t sleep, no sleep in her eyes. She went to the bookshelf with the intention to have a good book but then turned. I don’t want to read! She saw from her room’s big window, the guests were still there, some had gone. She came back to her room without saying bye to them. She wanted to have her black coffee at the moment but she was compelled to stay in her room because she doesn’t want to talk to anyone at this moment. It was about 1 p.m. All the guests had gone now from ‘Awan House’. She had engaged herself with a good Netflix series. She was relaxed now. Just then, there was a knock on the door. “Come Ashar.” She already knew who was there knocking at this hour of the night. “Why you came

back earlier?" He looked worry about her. "Nothing, I wasn't feeling well."

"What happened Miral, are you okay?" He was reading something on her face.

"No need to worry Ashar, you know I don't like gatherings and crowd. I was feeling exhausted so, I left the party and came in my room to relax." She was trying to ignore his reading eyes.

"You know what, Miral, you can't hide anything from me. You can be a blur version for everybody else but not for me, I can read you easily at any point, even at this hour of the night as well. You can hide yourself from the world, escape away from them even, but not from me. Because you live here!" He pointed at his chest with a finger. She smiled. "I know but relax, I am not hiding anything from you. You better know that I love being in my own company or with you only. I am alright but you look tired. Go take some rest Ashar!" He couldn't say anything more, he was literally tired after hectic day. He stood from his bed and opened the door to go out, just when a voice appeared; "Thank you

for those flowers again." She was splendidly saying this! He smiled back at her little princess, Miral.

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He entered the "Artistic Holding". He was in the middle of corridor when he heard a female voice behind him. "Sir". She was the receptionist who called him to inquire. "I want to meet Mr. Fareed Awan." He said in a serious tone while his eyes were reflecting something else. "Do you have an appointment?"

"No".

"Sorry Sir, but you can't meet him without an appointment."

"Okay." He turned back but his footsteps were not towards the outside door but instead towards the lift. It seemed like he knew every corner of that building, or better say that main office of Fareed Awan. The receptionist didn't see him moving towards the lift and she was in a hurry to reach and submit something. He pressed the second-floor button. He could see straight that office where the labelled

nameplate was highlighted with the name of 'Fareed Awan'. He knocked the door and entered inside.

Just then, the view changed, the room changed, the years changed, and the time too.

He was sitting calmly in his hotel room. The rewinder of memory was hurting as always. Not all memories are good, some has got some flaws and bitter truths as well. He looked up at the wall clock. It was midnight. Another day accomplished. He came out from his struggling years after a lot of passionate hard work. He worked hard and got the ownership of that café. His dreams were different but not all dreams become reality and this reality needs to be accepted. The day you accept reality, days become normal, life becomes a bit easier. He had seen people running behind money, their greedy nature growing and them nourishing themselves with more and more money. Everybody was there busy, showing off their power. He was the part of same society consisting of those individuals which exist in this category. And he too was now the part of such category. "This is me Zaid Jahangir, I changed my

number. Can we meet?" he typed a message and pressed the send button. After only few seconds, the reply arrived; "Where and when?"

"Tomorrow. At the same place where we always meet." He replied and threw his phone on bed.

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This was a hopeful morning, beginning up with dawn, then the sunrise with birds chirping and melodious noise, then birds flying up with a hope, followed by smells of breakfasts around. He was sitting in a traditional café called 'Dhaba' in Urdu. He was wearing a grey t-shirt with blue jeans and a 'Markhor' cap covering his head. In one hand, he was wearing a wrist smart watch and in the other hand, he was wearing a black band. Hairs were wet as it was drizzling in Lahore when he left his hotel. From hotel garden to the car parking, he got a little wet. He had ordered his special cut 'Doodh Pati' (tea). He must enjoy that 'Doodh Pati' in that beautiful weather only if he would be an ordinary man, who enjoys every charm of life usually.

But this wasn't for him, this was his thought. After meeting Miral and coming back from that party, he directly came to Lahore from Karachi, the same night. He was disturbed but more rottenly exhausted. He was typing something on his mobile when he heard the sound of heels near him. He raised his eyebrows and then gave a gesture like if he was saying, 'you may sit here.' She was wearing a long black shirt with a white straight trouser and her hairs fixed up in a high ponytail. Only a mascara was applied as a makeup and nothing else. "When did you come to Lahore?"
Without any traditional Hello, hi, she asked Zaid. "Few hours ago." A usual unexpected answer. "Zaid you should stay away from Awan's family. I'm afraid and worried for you. On the other hand, your intentions are haunting me."
"You don't have to. I am okay, Naveen. Don't come in between! I am warning you this time." He was serious this time.
"But..." She hesitated and looked at his back.
"I am the owner of that café now and you know who I met?" He was building up her curiosity; she thought.

“Who? Oh! Don’t tell me! Was that girl in the picture which you sent me, was Miral?” She tried to make a correct guess through his light tone.

“Yes! Miral Fareed Awan!” (“Hmm… I wasn’t expecting you to be here.”) Her words were recalled in mind.

“Don’t hurt yourself Zaid. I am warning you.” She worriedly spoke, while still focusing behind him.

“I won’t.” He was careless about himself surely.

“Move on from your past.” She was really worried about him.

“I already have moved on from that. There is nothing to look behind. It’s been years and years when I turned those colorless pages.”

“I just want you to be happy, live your life normally.” She was hopeful but she couldn’t see in his eyes. Nobody can directly see in those charismatic eyes other than that one girl named; ‘Miral Fareed’.

“I am normal, Naveen.” He was hopeful too, but his light brownish eyes were hopeless.

“I am your best friend; I care about you and…” She was nervous to remind him about the care she had for him.

“Change the topic now!” He clearly doesn’t want her to care about him.

“When are you going back!” Another inquiry from the side of Naveen.

“After 2 hours!” He said normally like he doesn’t want to stay here for a longer time.

“What! Just don’t go.” Mind stopped her saying this but heart went against the mind every time!

“Will I stop?” She seemed to be uncomfortable now.

“I wish I could stop you but I am not much encouraged to do so!” Now, it felt like she was disappointed!

“You can’t stop me and even not anybody else.” He was confident enough to throw these words out of his mind.

Then after while Zaid asked about her life finally; “What about you? How’s your job going on?”

“I got an offer to produce and direct a new web series, but I am out of my budget this year.”

“I can give an offer!” His sparkling brown eyes shined even more.

“I don’t need your help.” She clearly refused him.

“I am just giving you an offer.” He offered again without any hesitation.

“Please Zaid, now I don’t need your help anymore. I want to do something on my own. I can’t depend on anyone now.” Was she pretending to be strong enough?

“Hmm, let’s see then. Goodluck!” This time, he didn’t insist anymore.

“Thanks.” She said in a lower voice.

“For what?” He was looking in another direction now.

“For not helping me this time!” Was she angry or disappointed? He still was looking in other direction, focusing on a point.

“Oh! But still, I want to help you. But if you think you can, then I won’t come in your way.” He looked at his wrist watch and stood up. Was he getting late?

“Where?” She asked him when he was standing right in front of her.

“Time to leave, you enjoy this weather! Goodbye.” He smiled and booked his cab which was only two minutes away.

“I can drop you at the airport if you want.” She offered this time.

“No, I don’t need your help.” He refused this time.

“It was just an offer from my side.” She cleared.

“But I am rejecting your offer! Is that clear to you?” He smiled and winked an eye! She could only smile. His cab arrived and he went towards the cab. While, she could only see him go every time. She always endured that feeling silently and alone. “I wish I could stop you but I am not much encouraged to do so!” She slowly murmured. Letting go was never an easy task, even for Naveen too. She opened Zaid’s chat box, clicked that photo and looked at that girl in white flowery, top with a navy-blue skirt, wearing beautiful pearl neck piece, a beautiful diamond ring in her ring finger and light blue colored square heels. She was Miral! She looked fabulous! The picture sent by Zaid. The one that she saw on her Instagram profile as well which was

uploaded last night. A lot of followers, multiple lovely comments about her beauty, about her dress, some asking about the brand, designer and some putting on only beautiful emojis in the comment section. Despite that all' Naveen felt hatred towards her. But she didn't know that she was not only the one who hates Miral. She deleted Miral's picture from her gallery and then ordered her tea. She was having headache now!

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"When are you coming?" She typed a message. After a while, she received a reply. "On my way." Today was the deadline of her assignment and she had already submitted before the time, probably last night. She was now here just to enjoy her favorite black coffee. Or was the reason different this time? She couldn't decide. Was the new reason related to those light brownish eyes? Oh! No! Miral there's nothing like that? But he was not therein the café! But why? Miral, just don't care about him. He is only a restaurant owner. That's it! No need to overthink!

Overthinking is a disease clearly! Especially, in this 21st century, every other young man were the victims of this disease!

She wanted to ask the waiter about "Where is your owner?" but she stopped herself. Memories rewind back and that party night at Awan House was in front, going on like a recap in front of her eyes when she felt someone putting something on the table. She was Shehzil. She came finally.

"Where were you?" She was angry, just because she was late or the reason was something else. "I was on the way; you know about this city's traffic routine!" She ordered her coffee. "Why your mood is off?" After ordering, she paid attention to her mood. "No, I am okay!"

"Did something happen at home?" Shehzil was looking at her and she was looking at the corner table.

"No! Nothing." Her eyes still on the corner table. The waiters were going here and there. A pretty normal day! But not for her!

"Won't you share with me?" Shehzil insisted her but she knew that Miral would never tell that what was in her

heart. Nobody can read her mind. That was really a difficult task but not for everyone in this world!

“I am just feeling exhausted, that’s it.” An excuse, another one from Miral. Clearly, she doesn’t want to share anything.

“Oh! Never mind, but that night you leave the party also without telling me.” Miral’s face was in another direction. She was still looking at the corner table.

“Hmm. I was tired!” This time again, she lied to Shehzil, who was still looking at her face.

“Where is the restaurant owner… what was his name? I can’t remember… his name…”

“Zaid”. She suddenly spoke unintentionally. Why? She couldn’t have any clue for that!

“Oh yes! Zaid. Where is he?” She took the last sip of her black coffee and then, she put the mug on the table. She was done with her coffee.

“I don’t know.” The waiter was now serving Shehzil’s coffee when she suddenly asked him;

“Where is Mr. Zaid?” The waiter looked at her and then at Miral. Miral wasn’t expecting this, she was shocked. The waiter was looking at both of them. She controlled her anger. Control.

“He is in Lahore.” The waiter replied and then turned back.

“Oh!” Shehzil’s reaction.

The shocking reaction was now turned in anger. “Shehzil, why did you ask him? Why?” She groaned at her. “Why you did this? I am unable to understand!”

“Because, you wanted to know. You were having curiosity. Weren’t you having Miral?” Her voice grew.

“Listen to me, I was not having any curiosity. I could also ask him directly only if I care about it but I just don’t care.” She looked angry!

“This is what we call denial phase! You care but you don’t express!” Reality checks given by Shehzil.

“Please! Just stop it! I am not denying at all. I can ask him but why will I ask? Stupid, you are!” She couldn’t say that she was right, curiosity was always there but that ego comes in between every time. Ahh! This nonsense ego!

“You always deny Miral. You are not expressive; you never express your feelings. You just judge people according to your own criteria. Escaping away from the things you love is your defense mechanism. Even, you can escape away from your feelings as well. You are becoming heartless or maybe you are pretending to be like that. But you are not like that Miral. You used to focus on positivity of this world and nature but now, you are changing, your priorities are changing. You liked truth but I have seen you running away from reality.” Reality checks are always bitter! Especially, when your best friend is giving you those reality checks.

“I am not changing. No one can change, their nature never changes. I am setting my priorities now, that’s correct but I am doing that for my own self. I am now working on myself; I am working on my career. I am trying to be goal-oriented just like other strong women in the society. I am tired of this glamorous world, the war of class between the ordinary and extraordinary people of the society, elite class sophistications; I am tired. I want to be a self-made person.

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I don't need luxuries of life which can never make me happy and satisfied." Miral's mind wasn't accepting.

"But people run after these luxuries, they find peace in these luxuries and comforts of life."

"Because they don't know the real price of true happiness. I can never find peace around these luxuries. I want to explore the world with Ashar, I want to be happy with my brother. I want Ashar to be a completely different from my dad. I don't want him to run behind more and more money. I want to construct my career through my skills, not through my father's name. I want to be successful but more than this, I want to happy and satisfied from my life. I am finding a motive of my life and soon, I will discover it." Miral was right at this point.

"Okay! Serious discussions aside, what about tomorrow's plan?" Shehzil tried to change the topic.

"I am coming!" She said in a calm tone.

"But I was thinking to have our official lunch in a good restaurant but you choose this café. Why?"

“This café is better. I love the aura of this café. I feel relax! Well, we will do lunch here! Is that clear?” Her mood was clearly better now.

“But we can go to Pearl Continental or….” Shehzil tried to change the plan.

“No! This café is fine.” She was stubborn. She does what she wants. She was smiling now as she felt better than before.

“Hmmm. Well, café’s owner is also fine and smart!” And they both laughed.

“He is different, that’s only I judged about him.”

“What different?”

“Don’t know much, but my vibes say that he is a self- made person.”

“Can we believe on your vibes Miral?”

“I think you should!” Miral was pretty confident about her words.

“Okay! You are judgmental, look I was right. Your heart is finding true love and…” Miral laughed hard looking at her. Like seriously?

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“No guilt over that. You are crazy. You think it’s love but my dear it’s not! Just an attraction… maybe. I don’t know that why people are talking about true love in this era, I mean they are asking for true love from this heartless and selfish generation. People are talking about true love, and here I am, still confused about east, west, north and south!”

And then they both laughed.

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He was in his room. His room was elegant having grey curtains with a mix of grey, off-white interior of the room. She was the only one who doesn’t need any permission to enter his room, otherwise, all others weren’t allowed to enter that room without his permission. Miral was there in the room too with him as after dinner, they used to talk to each other, normal discussions and talk over the whole day. Dinner used to be silent as usual between three of them; Fareed Awan, Ashar Fareed and Miral Fareed. Sometimes, Ashar couldn’t join them and sometimes

anyone them would be missing from the dinner table.

“Ashar, what’s the problem, you look upset.”

“Because I didn’t bring flowers for you tonight.” He tried to laugh at his own joke.

“I am not joking. I am serious!” She was anxious about him.

“Oh! Look who’s serious? Miral!”

“Ashar! So, it is final that you will not share your problem with me.”

“What problem? There is no problem otherwise I could have told you already.”

“I know you are hiding something from me, but it’s okay if you aren’t revealing it now.”

“Let’s go eat ice-cream. Come on!” He was now picking up his wallet and car keys.

“Right now?” He was in a hurry.

“I am not asking you; I am just telling you. Now, come or else my mood will change.”

“Okay! I can never say no to sweets, you already know that.” They were now going towards the parking garage.

"I will drive the car." Miral told him. "I am not asking you; I am just telling you." He handed over car keys to her. Now they were sitting in an ice-cream bar shop, eating their favorite chocolate lava ice-cream when she spoke contentedly; "You have got the only talent to make me happy, Ashar."

"Well, I have lots of hidden talents. The problem is that, even I can't find them."

"You will never be serious!"

"Not with you at least. It's enough for me to be arrogant boss with my employees but now, please let me be who I am."

"Okay! So, it's easy for you to pretend?"

"Yes! It's compulsion."

"No. It's your own choice or maybe your own will." She was taunting. She could do this!

"Miral, you can never understand. But no taunts over me this night." He raised his hands like he was saying that 'finish this all'. "How was your day, Miral?"

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“As usual in the café. I have applied in Canada and USA for my further studies. Waiting for their approval.”

“Great. I know one day; you will achieve what you aimed for.” He smiled at her.

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A new day filled up with new energy and excitement. She was ready for the new day. She was wearing a jet-black mini blazer with white inner shirt, no piece of jewelry except those black classy earrings that she was wearing in her ears. She took out a designer bag but keep it back in the cupboard. What she should chose for today; Making decisions were never easy, either to make a choice for which bag to carry or to career choosing or something else. Black or white bag? She was choosing her bag for today when the phone rang. She picked up her phone which was on the dressing table. She attended the call. “Miss Miral Fareed?”

“Yes speaking.”

“Can you visit Artistic Holding today?”

"Why?"

"Mr. Fareed will let you know when you will come." She only said OKAY and without listening another word cut the call. (Dad could tell me too, but no! he will never do this, he knew well that I am not going to come.) Her excitement was dull now after attending this call. She should not attend the call. But, now before going to her official lunch which was in the café, she has to visit the company. Another long route! Shit! She drove the car. Firstly, she was going to Artistic Holding. After parking her car, she entered that charismatic building which was covered with glass wall from top to bottom. The security guards, the receptionist and some other office workers including office boy and servants saw her and stood for her in order to greet her. But she took long steps towards the lift without seeing anybody. She entered that floor where Fareed Awan's office was located, she knew every corner of that office. She used to visit that office often during her childhood days as before having an aim to be a lawyer, she wanted to become a very famous, rich and successful

business woman but time changes and her dreams also changed. Now, she was about to complete her law degree in the upcoming years.

She knocked the door and entered. “Miral, nice to see you here after years.”

“You didn’t tell me at home. Why you needed me here suddenly?” She looked unhappy but calmly spoke. “I want to transfer some of my shares to you, for this I required some of your signatures.”

“But I don’t need any shares in Artistic Holding.”

“My everything is for you and Ashar. I know you don’t need, but I need to give it to you.”

“You may give it to mom.” A silent was laying for few seconds which was broke by the assistant who knocked the door. “Yes. Come in!”

“Sir, here are the documents.”

“You may go.” He took the papers from P.A and then said in a serious tone; “There is nothing here that belongs to your mom. Understood?” He handed over a pen and those papers to her.

“But she needed these shares more than I need them. She always wanted more shares, more money. But I don’t run behind this!” She didn’t touch the pen or those documents.

“Miral, don’t argue this time. I am doing this for your financial security. Now, just sign these papers.”

“I am signing them, but for Artistic Holding, I will never give up on my dream.” She took the papers and without reading a single word, signed them.

“Miral, I don’t want you to regret on your words. But do whatever you want to do, I will not stop you. Instead, I will support you. Because you are my daughter.”

“You can only support me with money. Okay! Fine. Can I go now?”

“We can have a coffee together; I have got some time.”

“No! I am getting late for an official lunch. Next time.

“Okay. Then you may go.” He spoke in a spot tone. “Miral, you should come to the company, at least one day. What do you say?”

“Let’s see dad, I need to go.” She stood and walked away.

After coming out, she tried to calm herself. One, two, three,

calm down Miral. Tears were coming in her eyes but she was controlling herself, trying to compose herself. Miral, you can't cry in front of anyone here. Control yourself. She tried to slow down her fast breath. She walked and crossed the corridor with heavy heart. Control, control yourself, you need to control, nothing is controllable, nothing is under control and then... a disaster of tears. She entered the rest rooms where she reminded herself that she was 'Miral', she can never give up on her dreams. "I will never give up on my dream." Calm down. They will always hurt you but will you give up? No, never. I can never do so. I am strong. I am not weak. I am not selfish like them. I can never let my dreams go. Never. These... these tears are not my weakness; I will never let anyone break my dreams or come in between. I will not give up. A reminder to herself. I can't afford leaving another dream just like I gave up on my dream of a beautiful, happy and satisfied family. Tears were now stopped. It was like her mind was saying those words, reminding her all those principles that she set for herself. She was silent. After a while, she set her face with

setting powder and went outside the rest rooms. She now had to go to the café after a long drive.

While driving, she could hear those harsh words from the past; An escape from present to the past; **"Your mother is selfish Miral. She is selfish! You need to understand this!"** Her driving speed increased.

"Your Mom left you Miral. You and Ashar are alone." She drives even more faster. Harsh speed like harsh reality! But she doesn't care. She couldn't escape from the reality. The reality is what it's!

"Will you join Artistic Holding?" She answered; "No". She stopped due to traffic signal which was red.

"Your parents are separated. Your mom has shifted to UK." Still, the signal was red. She was waiting for it to turn green while the eyes were emotionless.

"You are going to UK; you can meet your mother." She answered; "No, I don't want to meet her, don't insist." The signal turned green and she drives towards the café road.

“Miral, your mother wants to meet you. Why are you arguing, just forget the past.” She answered; “I don’t want to meet her. I can never forget that she left me when I needed her the most! I am not having a big heart like Ashar.” And then… she started crying in a corner where nobody can see her, hiding from the world’s eyes. There was nobody to wipe her tears, to make her feel good; she was alone. She finally reached the café, parked her car and went inside the café. Shehzil was already waiting for her with some other guests. She put a professional smile on her face and went towards them. Her expressions were perfect to hide that she was upset. She didn’t look around to see that one face or those light brownish eyes. She didn’t want to do this! This life was again looking colorless but she needs to focus somewhere else, maybe on her work. She opened her mobile and read the lines which always helped her to keep her morale high and to feel even more stronger.

The hurdles you felt in the way of your dreams,

But the passion, the dedication, the consistency won't decrease,
The hurdles provided by this world,
But the focus won't diminish.
The discouragement by some toxic people around,
That won't reduce our hard work.
In this gushy world, everybody is going to stop you,
Some will pass you, some will remain behind,
A very few is again gonna fill your heart with the love for your dream.
We'll again start saying that "It's not impossible".
Nothing but, start giving courage to your heart,
Sending message to your brain that, "Yes, I can!".
Restarting and resuming once again,
And making your body to feel your more dedicating energy inside you.
The clock is running, the sun is rising,
The moon is shining, the time is passing,
The seasons are changing, the river is flowing,
The science is evolving, the era is turning,

The glaciers are melting, the flowers are blooming,
And the mind is refreshing.
Keep rocking with the same dedication, energy and power!

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The official lunch was already over. Shehzil and other guests had gone. But she was still here. Why am I here? She got an offer for another project. She accepted this offer as she was having much time to complete this project until she got an approval from the universities where she applied. She was free and she hates being free, because she loses her focus and to build up constant concentration, she indulged herself in free lancing. She wanted to spent her time doing something productive. She was offered by her father to join Artistic Holding for gaining job experience but she doesn't want to go this way.

She wanted her black coffee, her favorite one which she ordered immediately. She was usually busy scrolling but she unusually turned back and she saw him, entering

inside the café. He was wearing a maroon shirt with black jeans and white sneakers. A markhor cap covering his head incompletely. He looked decent and a busy café owner. She saw and turned back. She needs to keep herself calm and normal. A waiter served her hot black coffee. She removed her mini black blazer as it was much hot today, even in the month of August too, but it was Karachi, never forget.

“Hey Miral!”

“Hi.”

“Glad to see you in my café.”

“Regular customer of your café!”

“Yes, that’s why I am glad to see you here. I was in Lahore. You must know about it; your friend asked a waiter.”

“Ahh! Yes. Maybe, she asked.”

“Can I ask you something if you don’t mind.”

“Why will I mind? Just go on and ask.”

“Are you upset? I mean it looks like you have cried.”

“Ahh…”

“Don’t deny in front of me, I am good at reading eyes! And your deep eyes are bad at hiding emotions.”

“Impressive but now I am not upset.”

“Means you were upset before coming here.”

“Don’t judge me wrong, Mr. Zaid.”

“I am just trying to evaluate the problem, if you need my help, I am available.”

“There is no problem and if there is, then I can handle and resolve it myself, I don’t take help from the people who are strangers to me. Don’t worry about me.”

“Oh! So, you are saying that I am a stranger to you. But I don’t think this way. I think we know each other better than before.”

“I just know your name, Zaid. So, you are a stranger to me, still.”

“I think we knew each other’s names and that’s enough for not being strangers to each other.”

“My coffee is finish so; I think I should leave now.” She stood up from her chair and picked up her purse.

“Miral… don’t waste your tears for those who doesn’t care. Take it as a free suggestion… which I know that you don’t require. But still, I am giving you. A free advice from a

stranger!" He was still looking at her like if he was scanning her mind through his eyes, like if he was trying to read her mind through his light brownish eyes. But did he succeed in reading her? Did he discover the fact behind her sad eyes? Possibly yes! Perhaps he couldn't! Might be it was difficult or impossible! Maybe he was unable to read those eyes! Conceivably, he was perplexed!

"I have a bad habit of giving an ocean whenever someone asks for a single drop." She sadly smiled and left the table. He stood there for a minute and looked at the coffee cup which she left on the table. **'Miral Fareed's eyes were not an easy read for him.'** He smiled and called the waiter to clean that table.

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"Miral, come join us and have dinner with us." She came home and now was entering her room, when Ashar called her. But she replied; "No thanks. I am not hungry." She just wants to sleep as she was much tired after this hectic day. "I am tired, I want to sleep."

Ashar came back to his room after dinner. His phone was ringing. An expected call; “Any report?”

“Sir, the situation is not good. The organizers are not willing to give more funds.”

“Hmmm… but what’s the reason.”

“Because you are taking actions against corruption, they feel like you should make a deal instead of standing against corrupt mafias.”

“Oh! So, now they will tell me that what Ashar Fareed should do.”

“But sir, I think they are right. It’s a dangerous game. You should not put your life at risk.”

“I have already put it at risk. I just don’t care. But I will not make any deal. That’s clear and final! If it’s a dangerous game, then, I am ready to be at the risky side.”

“As you wish but what about Mr. Fareed?”

“I will tackle him, don’t worry but for now, don’t let him know about what’s going on inside.”

The person said ‘okay’ but his voice was clearly showing his threatening tempo. Ashar knew that now he could not

move a step back. He closed the eyes, just when those flashback memories hit harder at this hour of the night time...

"Ashar, your own company, Artistic Holding is involved in corruption too; How you are going to cope-up with this?" His lawyer was asking him.

He opened his eyes and went towards his bed.

"This isn't easy, it's a treacherous game. Plenty of enemies will encircle around you. How will you face them all?"

He turned off his mobile and looked upward at the fan.

"You are putting your life in danger. Don't do this. It's risky!"

He was still looking at the fan. He took the remote and turned off the A.C, the room was cold enough.

"Will you stand against your own father? We all know that he's also corrupt!"

Then, he turned off the lamp too. Now, the room was dark and black. He closed his eyes.

“Nothing can stop me! Nothing will stop me!” He could only murmur this after hitting the reality again. He couldn’t sleep peacefully these nights due to those nightmares but surely, nothing can stop him now. He tried to make efforts again to sleep.

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She woke in the morning with a headache. She took a tablet (Panadol) with a cup of tea. Nothing was fascinating her today. She has to work on her new project but she wasn’t feeling focused. She scrolled the Instagram. She watered her pot plants. She read a book too, but nothing could make her mood cherished until a message tone diverted her overthinking mind. “Hey! Miral. This is me Zaid. How are you now?” She was in her terrace when she read this text from an unknown number. From where did he get my number? She was thinking when the maid interrupted; “Should I serve your lunch, Ms. Miral?” “Hmm.” She was busy replying when she answered the maid. She wrote a text; “Who? I didn’t recognize you.” But

then, erased the text and typed again. “From where did you get my number?” After thinking for a second, she pressed the ‘send’ button. The reply arrived after a minute. “It’s not important that from where I get your number but the other question is more necessary, that how are you?” Send button pressed from the other side. A smile appeared on her face, she sat on a couch and typed the reply; “I am fine. But you don’t have to worry about me.” He smiled at the text.

“Hmm. Well, I know that you don’t want anybody to be anxious for you. But I should worry for my regular customer, shouldn’t I?”

“I don’t know.” She went to the dining hall as she was now hungry. Ultimately, her mood, state of mind and temper, all were cherished.

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After 3 days;

This was another bright evening of August. Karachi’s famous ‘Ocean mall’ was lighten up in the evening. Today,

she was wearing a simple but elegant lemon-yellow long frock with white high heels and a beautiful chain around her neck which was containing a butterfly locket. As always, she looked beautiful and elegant. She was holding a small white clutch in her hand as well. She was there for shopping as she was looking for her favorite boutique. After one hour, she was now holding a shopping bag too. She almost completed her shopping, when she felt someone's slow voice. "Hey Miral! Glad to see you." He was Zaid. He was wearing a black shirt with blue jeans and a markhor cap on his head. His every day getup probably!

"Oh! You." She was surprised.

"Yes, me! Couldn't I come here?" He shrank his eyes and was seeing her face. A smile on his face was there.

"No, I mean don't declare it as a coincidence because I don't believe in it." She tried to clear.

"Don't worry, I am not stalking you. We can have coffee together. What you say? I hope you aren't getting late to reach somewhere?" He said in a sarcastic way.

“Yeah! Sure, why not! I have got some time today.” She already was craving for a coffee, so, she didn’t refuse him. They both went towards the food court of the mall which was at top floor. They both settle down on a table when he asked her; “How’s your free-lancing going on?”

“Well, it’s going good, I am working on my new project nowadays.”

“Great! If you need any co-working space, then you may work in my café too.”

“Yeah! It will be better. Thanks for the offer!”

“I must go and order our coffees.” He stood up from his place when she spoke; “I will order…”

“A black coffee. I know.” He finished her phrase. She smiled and looked at his back while he was going. He went to order their coffees and then, after placing their orders came back with two coffees in his hand and started the conversation from where it has to be continued.

“Now, you shouldn’t be thinking that we are strangers. Isn’t that so?” She took a small sip from mug. That black coffee! It tastes good! But it wasn’t the best. The only best

taste black coffee was made in his café, she was pretty sure about it!

“Hmm… you are saying that we are friends? Sorry to say but I am a blunt sometimes, I directly say what I want or what’s in my heart without any full stops or commas in between.”

“That’s great enough, you are a direct person. Otherwise, people here… are hypocrites.” He was direct too with his words.

“Why are you saying this?”

“Just according to my observation.”

“Oh! I see! But your observation could be erroneous too, Zaid. Or maybe, it’s just an assumption that you are making.”

“Miss Miral, I am good at reading people.”

“But I remember, before you said that you are good at reading eyes!”

“It’s similar; reading eyes or reading face.”

"No! It's not similar. **Reading face is a skill but reading eyes is an art, an aptitude!** There's difference in both."

"I still don't get it, Miral. I think I am not smart enough. So, elaborate more, what's the difference between skill and aptitude?"

"Simple, skill is something that you learn through your efforts. While, aptitude is a natural ability."

"Deep and smart."

"Well, thank you for the compliment."

"Are we still strangers?" He asked again as if wants to discover his favorite answer from Miral which was a 'no'. But she is never going to say this, he knew this too.

"Yes!" He couldn't stop his laugh. "Why are you laughing? It wasn't a joke! The only thing I know about you is your name and that you are my favorite café's owner. I don't know anything else about you, so, you are a stranger."

"Still?" He smiled as if, this was a joke now.

"Now please don't remind me our number of meetings."

“Okay! I am not reminding you, don’t worry. Because I, myself don’t remember that how many times we have met almost.” A silent in between two strangers.

“The coffee is good!” She spoke to break the silence.

“But not as good as my café’s coffee.” He was sure about his café’s coffee taste.

“I agree you!” She spoke this phrase in usual tone while taking a sip of coffee.

“Okay! The history would remember that for the first time, Miral Fareed agreed to my point.” There was something in his voice. His excitement! That exhilaration in his tone; She felt that elation in his tone. She smiled. What else she can do! Miral, what are you doing here with him? Just run away. Escape from here! Can I? Why am I here? She didn’t want to listen to her mind this time. She wants to listen to her heart and her heart was compelling her to put her ego aside. It’s normal! Just an attraction, maybe! She was not sure. The heart wasn’t sure. That war between heart and mind is always cruel! A message appeared on her phone which was on the table. It was Fiona’s (her maid) text! She

opened the text. “Mr. Fareed is urgently going to Canada tonight.” She read the text. She looked disturb now. But she needs to go now, otherwise this guy on the other side of the table would surely read her face or eyes! “Now, I need to go. Here’s the coffee bill…” She took her wallet from her clutch.

“Please, this isn’t my café where I will take the bill. I offered you a coffee, so I’ll pay the bill and I have already paid the bill.” His light brownish eyes were sparkling.

“But…” She tried to pay the bill. But he was more stubborn, maybe.

“I said, this was from my side. You can thank me later.” She smiled and come forward. “Thank you for this coffee. And now… I think we are not strangers.”

“You’re welcome. And I am glad about it.” She smiled and after saying ‘goodbye’, left. He stared at her until she disappeared. It was a good evening probably. Two of them were no more strangers! But was it for real? For him, it was the right script that he was following. But was there any need for improvisation? Off course, there wasn’t. His past

has always been troubling. When you aren't fed love on silver spoons, then you become used to of licking knives without getting hurt. But can he hurt Miral Fareed? Can he hurt that girl with golden heart? Was he hurting himself? No, almost not! He needs focus! Concentration! The only thing he needed was success. That strive for success; that hunger for being powerful; that hard work for obtaining success! This wasn't a bad dream but the obstacles were ready to turn him bad, an antagonist of his own story. Dreaming was never an evil deed. But will he survive in this all? He never felt any feeling. He wasn't ready for any other situationship. He wasn't surely! All these thoughts triggered his mind. He let his thoughts go away and stood. He has to reach his café. He was already late but he can't miss this chance to directly meet Miral. But was he stalking her? He came to the mall as usual but then, he saw Miral entering a shop, from here, and he started stalking her and then, met her finally, declaring it as a coincidence, simple! He surely, listened to his heart that evening! And go after

Miral. **“It feels like stars collide when I see you.”** He whispered.

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Fiona told her about the guest who arrived at Awan House, which was now called as ‘Fareed House’. Her mood was spoiled after listening his name. “Not you once again!” She wasn’t expecting him to be here today in early morning. But he’s always going to do what is never expected from him. He was the only one who can spoil Miral’s mood in seconds. Not even in seconds after looking at his face, her mood got spoiled and that sober girl turned into a most angry girl on this earth. “Miral, now, go meet him and spoil your mood. Otherwise, he will not leave.” She was wearing a black t-shirt with black trouser. Her hairs were let open. She went downstairs towards the poolside where he was present. That indecent and rude Carl! He looked at her while she walked towards him. “Good morning! Miss Miral.”

“What are you doing here?”

“Miral! You didn’t reply to my good morning!” He pretended to be sad.

“This is only a morning for me, nothing good in it now, as you have arrived to spoil my day, maybe the whole week.”

“Or maybe the whole month or till the arrival of Mr. Fareed.” He laughed in the most indecent way, showing all his teeth! How ill-mannered he was! “Chill Miral. You have to bear me as always! It’s your compulsion sadly. Aren’t you going to offer me breakfast?” He looked around the house like a covetous.

“I repeat my question; What are you doing here?” She was serious.

“I came here to remind you about your responsibilities.”

“You don’t have to remind me that, Carl.”

“I have to do this because you are unable to remember your responsibilities, that’s why, I need to come here again and again until you join the office. Mr. Fareed Awan is in Canada. He has ordered me to bring you. I need to do this!”

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“I know and I will come to office. I know my dad wants me to join the office in his absence. I’ll come. You don’t have to worry about me, Carl. Now you may leave.”

“As a finance manager of Artistic Holding, I am doing my job.” He winked at Miral.

“From an ordinary body man to finance manager, you succeeded very quickly, wow! Just can’t make sense, how it was possible?”

“Skills and talent, that make up my way for this change.”

“You think that you are skillful and talented, but Carl, actually, I don’t think the same.” She came forward and looked into his eyes while speaking. Carl laughed hard.

“Your humor! Miral, I just love it! We’ll really enjoy much in office too.”

“Don’t dream too much, Carl.”

“I am delusional. No cringe in that!”

“Now, will you go? And please just send a bouquet in my neighbor too, they invited me for an evening’s party, send them some beautiful flowers.”

“You are taking my favor! Wow! Impressive change!”

“Idiot! It’s not a favor, I am ordering you. Now go from here. You already spoiled by morning.”

“I am so glad that I spoiled your beautiful morning! Bye! Miral Fareed. See you soon!”

She looked at the file which he left. Dumb Carl! Now, she wants or not, she has to join her dad’s office until he arrived back after attending a prolong exhibition in Canada. Ashar was also busy. Miral has no other choice! She wanted to withdraw from her new project as well but then, think about managing both by herself. “Get up and get ready for the office Miral.” She gets up and moved towards her wardrobe for deciding today’s attire. “Ma’am, your breakfast is ready.” Fiona knocked and entered the room. “Okay, coming Fiona.”

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She was tired after a long hectic day. She called Ashar but he didn’t pick up her call. “Ahh! Where are you, Ashar?” Working at Artistic Holding wasn’t her will but she has to. Moreover, working with Carl was way too unfortunate but

she has to. She was in the gym this weekend. A lot of calories to burn through workout. She was in her track suit. After gym, she came home and took her diary out. She was having a habit of mentioning all important events in her diary. This time again, she settled down on the couch to write about herself, to write about those who met her and all things which were necessary to her.

She lives the poetry, she couldn't write.

"Life has been dramatic. I am not sure about it but life's revolving so fast. This world will never give you peace in something you were never meant to settle in. But I met somebody after coming from Islamabad. I can't forget those light brownish eyes. I can never! I can deny this in front of world but what to hide in front of my own self. Well, I feel like he's a self-made person, he has acquired that quality of life. He says, 'we are not strangers' and my heart says the same. But I am not having that courage to go and tell him that 'yes, we are not strangers.' I have always ignored such things but this time I am unable to do so."

She recalled those moments with a deep smile on

her face; they met in the café. They met in the party, she came to know that he was the new café owner, she was having coffee with him in the mall, they were talking, he was giving his free suggestion and she always used to run away, she never learned to calm herself in front of him.

"Everybody said that 'Miral you have changed.' Really? Am I not the same Miral? They say that now, I am more rational. I am declining my emotional state. But what can do? I miss my happy family! I miss you a little louder! I miss my mom and my dad too. I miss my happy days when we all were together, those childhood days when we used to spend our vacations in Abbottabad. Every time, this reality hurts me a lot. I only wished for a happy and complete family. Was it something, impossible? But now, in my life, it's truly impossible! I miss those mountains and those tracks, where Ashar and I used to walk and climb. I miss Ashar too. He's so busy nowadays. Now, I love him the most. He is my family. I trust him the most. I am proud of him. He is the best brother! He always knows what's going

on in my heart. I love him the most in this world. It feels like every charm of life is dying inside me. Life is too ironic to fully understand. I am understanding the lessons of life gradually! Every word has consequences! Every silence too! That's why, I chose silence this time." She closed the diary and put it back in her locker. Her face was wet due to tears. As always, she was hiding her tears from the world. She always does this! Because she was Miral Fareed. Too many wishes, too many regrets followed by too many mistakes. The power of super speed or the ability to fly up higher, both were super risky. But sometimes, it's better to take risk in life once!

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She looked busy today in the office. She was wearing lavender colored long shirt with white trouser today. Straight dark brown hairs were remained open. Her phone was ringing while she was working on her laptop. She picked up the call without seeing the caller's name.

"Miss Miral?"

“Yes, speaking.”

“Ashar’s life is in danger.” She couldn’t say anything ahead. How can she say something? Impossible! How can she bear being far away from his brother? How could she live without him? She loves him the most! How is this possible that his life is in danger? Impossible to believe! She was shocked! This life cannot be crueler to her. That wasn’t a shock; that was a serious fear. The fear of losing your beloved one! The fear that always haunts you and say; ‘this world is disastrous! You are alone! You can’t do!’

That fear in you let you remain silent, that fear kept on discouraging you; Miral, you can’t lose another important person of your life. You can never!

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“Tragedy”

“Ashar’s life is in danger. Miral, can you hear me?” The girl on the other side of the call was still saying something but she couldn’t hear anything. A tear dropped out from her eye. She couldn’t resist more. She needs to go, find Ashar,

she definitely, needs to meet him, now, right now. She didn't even ask the person on call, that why she was saying this, why his life is in danger, why she was caring about Ashar, why Ashar took this danger and what was the danger in actual; she didn't ask anything, she didn't inquire about anything, in fact!

She canceled the ongoing call. Her brain was stopped at a moment. But then, she packed up everything and rushed towards the house. She drove the car in a very fast speed, ignoring traffic rules and obligations, just in a hurry, she went inside her house. "Fiona, where is Ashar?"

"Sir Ashar hasn't returned back."

"Whenever he returned back, call me!" Till night, Ashar didn't come to home. He dropped a voice message for Miral that 'he'll return tomorrow. No need to worry. I am stuck in an urgent piece of work. I will bring you, your flowers, don't worry! My dearest! I love you my dear sis."

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That evening was pathetic for both of them. She shouldn't have made that call. But now that mistake was committed. She has to face the consequences too. She was ready to face! Her only mistake was to care about that person who holds a stone heart under his chest. But she doesn't care.

"Abeer, why did you call her? You shouldn't say this to Miral. I am handling everything. Why did you tell her? Tell me." He looked angry.

"I called her because I am your lawyer. I care about your safety, as your lawyer, I think you shouldn't hide anything from your sister. You should be clear from your side, Ashar. Remember, you have a lot of enemies and black people around you. Care for yourself and for your family too. Standing against corruption in a country like Pakistan is never an easy deal. I appreciate your bravery but still, don't forget that in real, your life is in danger."

"If you are my lawyer, then, next time, don't take any step without acknowledging me. Is that clear to you?" He said this in a harsh tone, looking into her eyes.

"But I care about you, Ashar."

“You don’t have to. Do not show your sympathies.”

“But… Ashar…”

“I said, I don’t need your emotional drama here. Be professional, Abeer Raza.” He still looked angry. He was now smoking.

“You always hurt me like this. You love and care about only one woman in this world, Miral Fareed, your sister.” Felt like, there was a tear in her eye but she can’t show her tear or any of her weakness to this heartless person.

“I didn’t give you any hope. If you want, you may go to never come back, but stop bothering me. I may appoint any other lawyer for myself. I don’t need you, if you can’t show professionalism. Moreover, yes, honestly, it’s true that Miral is the most important part of my life, she is the part of me, and she lives here.” He pointed at his left side where the heart is situated.

“Okay. Please, don’t do this. I apologize.” She was trying her best to remain strong in front of him.

“If you want me to accept your apology, then, show me your professionalism and nothing else. I will not tolerate

next time. Be professional, Abeer." Now, he threw the cigarette into an ash tray.

"You always do this, but never change your lawyer. You always hurt me with your words and then console me through your behavior. But I am very stubborn too, that I always run behind you, even after looking at your high-grade ego." She came one step forward towards him. "But don't worry, you will only see my professional side from today." She picked up her files.

"Good for you, Abeer." Now, his voice was not harsh.

"One day, you'll put all your ego aside and will come after me. Remember it. Ashar Fareed." She was confident enough about her words.

"That one day would never come, Abeer Raza." He smiled and left that massive room.

"You will come, you surely will! I can't leave you, even if you want to escape away, I can't let you go." She whispered as if she was reminding herself. She looked a strong headed girl now.

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“Miral, good to see you.” She was in the café today as no mood to go to office. She was wearing a bottle green colored long shirt with green colored high heels and her reading glasses were deliberately put on to hide dark circles. Zaid entered and came directly to her. “Oh! Hi Zaid!” He was wearing a royal blue shirt with black jeans and a markhor cap on his head as usual.

“You seemed to be a busy girl now.”

“Yeah, I was busy in Fareed Holding... Ahh... my dad’s company.”

“Hmm and you just forgot me in all your busy schedule.”

“No, it’s not like that, I was really busy.”

“It means you didn’t forget about me.”

“I can’t forget about you.” She couldn’t say this to him but ended up speaking; “I didn’t say that too.”

“Are you okay?”

“What?”

“I mean, you look upset.”

“I am fine. Stop worrying about me.”

“Why? Why should I not worry about you? I mean for the liveliest girl of this world.”

“Why should you worry about me? I am okay!” She turned around as now an eye contact with him was much difficult.

“You called me lively, thanks for that!” She smiled; a true smile appeared after almost two days. The last two days were much depressing as Ashar didn’t return back. She could only talk to him on call or chat.

“If you don’t want to share, then, it’s okay. But if there’s any problem, you may share. You will be relieved.”

“Why should I share my problems with this hypocrite world? You said, earlier, that people here are hypocrites. Remember?”

“You will be relieved. Your heart has burden right now, by sharing your problem with any of the person, either any friend or any relative, you may share your burden as well.”

“Are you a philosopher?”

“Trying to be.”

“But what I think is that you can be a good philosopher, take my suggestion, sale this café to me and you go take admission in university, go take a degree in philosophy.”

“Good humor.”

“I mean, naturally, you are half philosopher. Your philosophical point of views! You shouldn’t agree being a café owner, all alone. Don’t waste your self.” She laughed.

“Do you think I will implement on your suggestion?”

“Of course, not. But my suggestion wasn’t that bad. Think about it.”

“Okay, I will. Anything else?”

“A black coffee.”

“In five minutes.”

“Waiting.” She was looking at his back when she received Fiona’s text; “Where are you? Come to home quickly. Sir Ashar has arrived home.”

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He was in his bedroom, about to take some rest after a long road drive, just when she entered the room without

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knocking the door. She looked furious! Yes, Miral Fareed was angry. “Abeer shouldn’t make that call.” He thought.

“Ashar, where were you? You know, how tensed I was, just because of you.”

“Why are you upset my dear?”

“You are asking me that why I am upset, why I am tensed. Like, seriously?”

“Miral, my dear, calm down.”

“Your lawyer, Abeer, called me. No need to hide anything from me. Please, tell me about everything. Don’t put yourself in danger. Please, don’t do this.” She couldn’t resist more as there was no need to be strong in front of her brother. Tears came out and she burst into tears.

“Miral, why are you crying? Look, I am completely alright. Look, I am okay! I am fine! Nothing happened and I assure you, nothing will happen.”

“You are the only person left in my life who I love the most, don’t put yourself in danger. I beg you. I can’t take any risk of losing you.” Tears were still coming out.

“Nothing will happen. I am not putting anything at risk. I am with you.” He wiped her tears with the palm of his own hand. “Look, I brought flowers for you.”

“Don’t change the topic, Ashar.”

“Okay, okay! (Tamam).”

“Tell me everything.”

“Okay! I am going to fight a case against corrupt people. I am standing against corruption in this country. For my case, I have hired Abeer as my lawyer. She is a brilliant lawyer, you know, I am hopeful about winning this case.”

“But what’s the need of doing this all? This is dangerous!”

“Miral, I can’t stop. This is my job. Some of the mafia leaders and bureaucrats have charged corruption charges on me, now I have to give them answer. Otherwise, I won’t stop their black deeds.”

“This is a risky game!”

“Many people said this before too but nothing can stop me now.”

“Even not I?”

“Even not you, Miral.”

“Means, I need to support you, whether I want or not?”

“Yes! Your support matters a lot. I will be grateful for your encouragement.”

“What if I never support you in this case?”

“I know you can never do that. But if you did so, then, I will lose everything. My sister’s support is very necessary for me to stay strong.”

“Don’t make me emotional.”

“You are already emotional, my dear.”

“You are laughing. Seriously?” Ashar wiped all her tears and handed over a tissue paper to her.

“See I am not worrying, then, why are you worried?” She cleaned her tears.

“You are the only one left in my life in terms of family. Please, I can’t imagine this life without you. Don’t put yourself at risk.”

“Miral, stop, you are not weak at all. Be strong. You are strong to face any thunderstorm in your life, no matter what. You are strong because you are Miral Fareed. You are my sister! Ashar Fareed’s sister! I heard you have a

presentation tomorrow in office. Now, get up and prepare for your tomorrow's presentation. If it goes well, I am going to give you a really special treat for that."

"I can't focus on anything." Now she wasn't crying.

"Trust me." He was looking in her deep, wet eyes.

"It's difficult for me."

"Miral, trust me, I'll fix everything."

"You take some rest, we'll talk tomorrow."

"We won't talk on this matter again."

"But I would like to talk more about it, Ashar."

"No, we won't talk. Clear? Now, don't you dare forget what I said!"

"But..."

"Clear?"

"This is wrong!"

"I couldn't hear your 'yes', Miral."

"Good night."

"Good night and I love you my dear sister." She was about to go but stopped.

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“Don’t leave me alone in this wild world.” She needed a promise, maybe!

“I won’t. Trust me, I will be there for you, Miral.”

“Always?”

“I can’t give you any guarantee, but I will never leave you alone till my last breath.”

“I am tired of everything, now.”

“You shouldn’t be! This is the beginning only and you are already tired. No! Remember, fight and make efforts until you conquer. And when you finally win, then, fight even harder, make even more strong efforts to turn your win a permanent one. In all this, you can’t stop, you won’t take rest, you won’t resist. That’s the amount of your victory that you need to pay.”

“Isn’t it a big amount?”

“You know what the biggest amount of any fight is?”

“What?” She couldn’t make sense to what he was saying.

“One’s life.” He came a little closer.

“No!” She was even more afraid for him, for the words he was uttering.

“Yes, that’s the reality. Sacrificing your life is the biggest amount that only people with big hearts would pay. Now, go and focus!”

“Focus? On your words?” Perplexity grew. The tension in those words!

“You can do that too but right now; you need to focus on your upcoming presentation.”

“Ufff.” She left his room and he went to open up his laptop to make a skype call.

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“Do you think that we are only friends? Nothing more than that!” early morning, she dressed up in a light pink jumpsuit and came to the office. After her presentation was done, she decided to treat herself with a good black coffee as her presentation goes well, unexpectedly. She came to the café during lunch break. She already had called him before arriving here. "Zaid, let’s have coffee together!”

“Miral, glad to hear that you want to have coffee with a stranger like me, really!”

“We are not strangers now.”

“Then, who are we?”

“Friends… maybe more than that!”

“More than that?”

“Are we only friends? I don’t think so!”

“What do you think?”

“I think nothing! Leave it.”

“No, but I consider you only my friend!”

“Do you think that we are only friends? Nothing more than that!”

“Yes, off course, I never gave any gesture to you. I randomly, care about everyone.”

“Everyone or every other girl?”

“Miral…”

“No, make it clear for me. You think that I am only a random person in your life!”

“Miral…”

“You know who I am! I am Miral Fareed!”

“You’ll get hurt if I speak the truth.”

“You think you are not hurting me right now.”

“Relax!”

“What! You are hurting me. You were different for me.”

“Miral, you are really very nice. You are brilliant but you and I can never become us.”

“You were different for me.”

“I meant to be nothing for you!”

“But you were… you were different for me. Different from all others.”

“Miral… stop yourself. You don’t have to waste these precious tears for me.”

“You were right, we are still strangers for each other. I admire you. Is it wrong to admire somebody?”

“You are admiring the wrong person, Miral.”

She stood away and ran out of the café although the steps were heavy just like the heart was much heavier to carry. Dreams shattered and crushed. Those two remain strangers to each other. That’s what, destiny has planned for them. That’s what their ending was. But was this the ending. No, obviously, not! It’s only a start. A start to their story. Destiny has got much more in its roadway

destination. The coal would turn into diamonds. The heartless obsessions would turn into heartfelt gratitude. Time would change everything for two of them. How long?

He called Naveen after reaching home.

“She cried a lot. She cried because of me.”

“You should stay away from her.”

“I will. The plan was to stay near to develop her trust. But instead of trust, she caught feelings.”

“Don’t worry, she will understand!”

“Hope so. Now, execute our plan B.”

“What’s the plan B now?”

“To stay away from Miral Fareed.”

“Perfect!”

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“He said, I am brilliant, but we can’t be together! Shehzil, how can he be like that?”

“Miral, just leave. He’s a random guy!”

“I am not going to leave it like this! You just watch, what I am going to do now.”

“Miral, relax. You don’t have to do anything.”

“He doesn’t know that I am Miral Fareed. You just see, what I am going to do now.”

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“Miral, good to see you here.” She was shocked for a moment to see two of them, sitting together. Carl and Zaid.

“I didn’t know that you both know each other.”

“This world is too small, Miral. Not everyone here is stranger to others.”

“Connections! Impressive.”

“Carl, are we going to discuss points or not? I am in a hurry.”

“Calm down, your mood is off?”

“No, you don’t have to worry for me.”

“Oh! I am just worrying for my colleague, not for Miral Fareed. Let me go and bring fresh juice for you.”

“No thanks, Carl.”

“I am telling you, not asking.”

“But... Carl, I am not having time, stop!”

“Can we talk? Miral?”

“Why are you asking me when this is all your plan to call me here through Carl.”

“You were not picking up my call, Miral. What else I can do?”

“I blocked you.”

“What?”

“Yes. Just leave me alone.”

“I can’t.”

“Why?”

“I need to clear my side.”

“Wow! Brilliant! Zaid! Superb.”

“Miral, this time, you are overreacting. My purpose wasn’t to hurt you.”

“Then, what’s your purpose?”

“No purpose, Miral.”

“You always lied to me. Your actions, gestures, all seemed to be beautiful lies. But now, you can’t trap me.”

“I didn’t trap you, Miral.”

“You are a liar, Zaid. I am not an ordinary girl of this society, remember it. I am not ordinary that you will treat me like a tissue paper and then throw away like it was never your possession.”

“I know that you are extraordinary! I know very well about you, Miral.”

“Okay, I will ask you only one thing. Why we can’t be together?”

“You want to hear the truth?”

“Yes, only truth!”

“Perfect.” She was seeing him and he was seeing in her eyes. “Because you are daughter of Fareed Awan.” She couldn’t utter another word. Fareed Awan, her father. Other connection. Was it a sin to be daughter of Fareed Awan?

“This is not an excuse!”

“This is reality, Miral. You wanted to hear truth, so here it is.”

“Zaid, what’s your purpose?”

“Can you leave everything for me? Off course not! You can’t leave your luxurious life. You can never do this. You only love yourself just like your father. You are so proud of your father, but the reality is that, I wish that you were not his daughter. I wish, we could have met in another part of the world like strangers. But circumstances are opposite. You can’t leave these luxuries.”

“Miral, here comes your fresh juice served by special chef Mr. Carl.” She took the glass and threw it with full force. The filled glass collided the floor and crashed. CRASH! SMASHED!

The reality was bitter. It wasn’t easy to accept it anyway. She escaped away as always. “You will always escape from the climax situation, Miral.” This time, Zaid said this aloud.

“Carl, make it clean.” Another order for Carl.

“Why was she angry?”

“No worries, reality checks hit harder, you know!”

“Oh! Be careful, manipulation can feel like love.” He winked his eye and Zaid was perplexed.

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“Because you are daughter of Fareed Awan.” These were not only the words. They were hitting like hammer on the brain. She was enduring all the pain herself. The pain hidden in those letters, in that tone. “You hurt me again, Zaid.” She was in her room. Dark room, no light turned on. “We will always remain strangers.” She opened up her diary and started writing. “You were right, I can never leave these luxuries. I am used to of this life. And why will I leave everything? Why?” She was still writing under her lamp light. The other half of the room was still dark. “You are just like others. Use, reuse until it’s vanished. Will I leave everything behind for a guy like you? Seriously!” She closed her diary and put in locker.

“Miral. What are you doing?”

“Ashar, I am here.”

“Are you okay?”

“Yes, off course.” She tried to smile.

“I was here to say that let’s have dinner.”

“Okay, I am coming.” She was still pretending to smile in front of him. She never expressed her feelings in front of this world but what happened to her while she was in front of Zaid. Why she expressed her feelings in front of him? Why? She thought. She was great in hiding her emotions from this world. She never expressed what she felt. But this time. No! She can never show her weak point to this world. She was strong! She was Miral Fareed. Nobody can hurt her. Nobody, even not Zaid. Even not her father, Fareed Awan. She was strong headed.

“Ahh! Just forgot. This is for you.”

“What’s this?”

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“Unwrap it later and find out, what’s hidden inside. I am sure you will love it.”

“But any reason behind this special present?”

“Should there be any reason to give gifts to my only sister?

“No… but still…”

“Miral, you are my everything. I want to see you happy. You are going to love this gift.”

“Oh! I love you too, my dear brother.”

“I am feeling hungry and I don’t want to sit alone and eat. What about a late-night movie today?”

“It shouldn’t be horror, please.”

“Okay, I am waiting for you.”

“You go, I am coming.” She smiled and went to wash her face to look fresh.

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They both were on the dining table as their dinner was served. Ashar was trying to evaluate her mood swings.

“How’s your office going?”

“All is well.” Her eyes on her plate.

“Great!” Ashar was now taking a drink from jug.

“When will dad come back to Karachi?”

“Next week, probably.” He was now drinking few sips.

“Hmm…”

“Will you stay in Artistic Holding after dad comes back?” He was hopeful that she would stay now.

“Yes, I was thinking to continue working there. As I am free nowadays until I got an email from any of the university.”

“Seems to be a good idea! I will be happy to see you in Artistic Holding.”

“Dad will also be glad that I joined his company. His desire, you know, to see me in Artistic Holding.”

“He will be proud of you! And I am also proud of my beautiful sister!”

“But I just wanted to complete my further law studies ahead. Once I get call from any of the university, I will leave the company and this country and you will not stop me that time.”

“Okay, I will not!” Both completed their dinner and went to watch a movie.

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She was in Carl’s office that day, wearing link pink top with blue jeans and a bracelet having butterfly locket. “You

destroyed a piece of my crockery, Miral. That was much rude of you." Carl spoke in a pretending tone of sadness after they completed their respective task about the upcoming shipment. "What are you talking about?" She was still focused on her laptop.

"Oh, you forgot, that day, when Zaid was there!"

"You should always be ready for that sort of reaction from my side."

"I should be afraid of you." Another drama of Carl.

"You should be." She looked at him and smiled sarcastically.

"That day, you shouldn't react like that, Miral."

"Now, Carl will tell me that how I should be reacting! Really! Very funny."

"It's not funny."

"Listen, you are not here to advise me! Mind our own business."

"You like Zaid, don't you?" A minute of silence passed between them. Nervous trip over her head. Oh! Was it a

very difficult question to ask? No, actually, this question frightens!

“Not your concern, Carl.” She let all her over thinking go aside.

“It’s already there in your eyes.” He pointed at her eyes with his finger.

“And what’s there in my eyes? Explain, please!”

“The thing which is there in your heart, but you aren’t letting it come on your tongue! Maybe, you are afraid! Afraid of your father!”

She stood from her seat and bent a little ahead on the table. “You know what, this world is not the place where you show all your emotions, otherwise, the people here would definitely ruin you!” There was a knock on the door and then, it was opened immediately. Someone entered inside. Miral turned back to see but stopped in a shock.

“You.”

“I came here to meet Carl.” Zaid said in a spot tone.

“Seems like you both share a very close bond.” She picked up her laptop and passed by his side, leaving the room angrily.

“What happened to her?” Zaid asked Carl. Carl looked at her back and said in a tone of joy as it was a regular tone which he used to hear from Miral.

“No worries, she is always bitter with her words.” He signaled him to sit on the chair where Miral was sitting a few minutes back. “Tea or coffee?”

“No, nothing! I came here for a work, you know.”

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“Who’s she?” Miral and Carl both were in the café this time. She pointed out at a girl to whom Zaid was talking to.

“She’s Naveen, his childhood best friend.”

“Oh, I see.” Carl looked at her face. He was still unable to look at her eyes as she was wearing sun glasses. “Are you jealous?”

“Why will I be?”

“Right! Why will you be? You are Miral Fareed!”

“Why don’t you mind your own business? Better?”

“And why don’t you offer me a coffee from your side?”

“Loser!”

“Thanks for the compliment but order something, otherwise, I will faint here out of hunger.”

“Why you exaggerate things?” He was irritating to be honest. Especially, whenever, he was with Miral.

“I think we should order these donuts? What do you say?” He was showing her the menu card.

“You are ordering, okay one for me too!” Miral was still looking at that girl with Zaid.

“Excuse me! You are going to pay the bill!” Miral hates this smile which was constantly there on his face.

“You won’t be shameful when a girl would pay your bill.”

“Don’t play feminist card here, please.”

“Then, you must study feminism theory after you reach your home! Okay?”

“What about the petrol and fuel? Do you know how expensive is petrol, in this country? We came here on my car and it takes fuel to work, if you know!”

“Ahh! What! All your fuel bills are paid by the company. Don’t lie in front of me at least.” He wanted to continue this argument but someone interrupted them.

“Oh hi! Are you Miral Fareed?” That girl came in front of her.

“Yes, but I couldn’t recognize you!” Miral looked at her first and then, at Carl.

“Oh sorry! How a you recognize me when we are just meeting for the first time!”

“First time?” She looked at her like questioning her that, why are you so frank then, if it’s our first meeting.

“I am Naveen, Zaid’s friend... I mean best friend. You know Zaid? The owner of this café?”

“Off course, I know!”

“I saw your pics! You are beautiful and your name too.” Her tone was sarcastic.

“Umm... thanks. I need to go! Goodbye.” She was about to go when Zaid came towards them.

“What are you doing here, Naveen?”

“I was just meeting Miral.” She displayed her hand forward towards Miral who was about to leave. “It was nice meeting you, Miral.”

Miral could only smile because she couldn’t say ‘same to you’ to her as it was not a favorable meeting for her, to be honest! But this meeting wasn’t good for both of them. That was true that both of them didn’t like each other much.

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“I am happy to see Miral, here in Artistic Holding.” Fareed Awan was back in Pakistan after a long business trip. Ashar was sitting in his office while he was sitting on his power seat. “She was compelled to be here.”

“Never mind.”

“How was the exhibition?” He ordered two cups of tea.

“Not bad, but profit margin is not upgraded.” Fareed Awan looked disappointed after his return.

“Have you signed the deal then?”

“Just thinking over it. Need time.” He opened up the blinders of window and looked outside. “You increased your security. Any issue?”

“Nothing special, just a normal security check, that’s it!” Ashar tried to answer in a composed tone.

“Hmm… you shouldn’t be hiding anything from me, Ashar.”

“Why will I hide anything from you, dad?”

“I don’t know, but maybe there’s something, you aren’t sharing. Any lesson that you refuse to learn will definitely repeat itself. Be careful!”

“Don’t worry, there’s no issue. And if there’s, then, I will sort it out myself.”

“Let’s see then!” Ashar nodded his head.

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It was 11:00 p.m.

It was a dark night outside. She was about to sleep but then, she heard a noise, a fearful noise. She rushed out of her room. She ran down the stairs. She was

afraid. The fear can be seen in her eyes. Her hear was pumping hard and fast. Somebody had just hurt her beloved! It was not an ordinary noise. It was a noise of a gunshot. A noise of pistol, maybe. A fire blown out at someone. She ran and reached the main door where she found someone laying down on the floor. Security guards high alert. She was astonished. The body lying on the floor was covered with blood. A river of blood flowing all over the earth. She couldn't dream of seeing this. She could never! But now, this was the reality. The reality was scary because the person lying on the floor was her beloved... brother... ASHAR FAREED

She saw somebody calling an ambulance. She couldn't utter a single word. Where was Fareed Awan? She didn't know. Tears were coming out from those fearful eyes, but she didn't know, that crying this time was natural. She wanted this hateful dream to end. DREAM? Reality or just a dream? No, this was reality. **Was Ashar Fareed's life about to end. Was this a finish? An end?** Mortality? She couldn't stand on her feet now. It was hard to breathe.

To be honest, life was ending at both the ends. Ambulance arrived. Police arrived! There was rush around! Stretchers came! From home to the hospital. The route was like walking on a barren land. Life was turning! It had turned. Everything was black now. No grey area. She heard herself uttering few words; “Please, don’t leave me, Ashar.” Tears still making her face wet. The boy she loves, her brother was in the emergency room. He was her support system, her own family, he was the one to spoilt Miral, to support her and now, maybe, he was leaving her alone.

One hour passed. Second hour passed! Even, the third hour passed! Just when the doctor from the Emergency Ward came out to report.

Was this a beginning to a massive tragedy?

“Sometimes when you are in a dark phase, you aren’t buried in it; you are just planted in it!”

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He didn’t know that this would be his last walk! He was out for a walk that night, wearing grey track suit. Ear pods in

his ears and he was on a call with some body. “Abeer, have you checked the black listers list?”

“Yes, I will check it. Only these are under suspicion?” A feminine voice replied back.

“Up till now, only they are! Do check them and be careful.” He was tensed at the moment.

The call was cut and he was near his house! He was all alone without any security. No bodyguard, no gunmen! As he was near the door of his house, a noise broke the silence. That wasn’t an ordinary voice. A gun shot! A pistol was triggered! Someone took the shot of his head and then, it was stroked on his head. Then, again a shot was placed down on his lower chest part. He fell down on the floor. Blood everywhere on the ground. He tried hard to open his eyes and when he opened his eyes, a blur vision of someone appeared. That was Miral. The one he loves the most. He again closed his eyes, then, tried to reopen his eyes, again a blur illusion appeared. This time, she was his mother. The illusion ended. The reality was back. It was hard to keep his eyes remain open. He could hear the

screaming voice around. Then, the voice of Miral came as she was saying; “Please, don’t leave me, Ashar.” And then, he fainted, lying on the floor. All voices died there. All dreams shattered there. All plans go wasted. Everything was ending up here for Ashar Fareed. Was he sacrificing? His life? Maybe not! Sacrifice was part of his fate. This was all planned. He probably, has made a lot of enemies. They always took advantage of their power and influence. Was this the end? A tragic end to Ashar Fareed’s life!

“You know what’s the biggest amount of any fight!”

“What?”

“One’s life.” He came a little closer. Ashar Fareed once said. He was brave. But now even that bravery wasn’t of any use anymore.

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That tragic night! They were in hospital. Miral, Fareed Awan, police, media and security guards. The headlines broke like fire in the jungle about the incident which

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happened a few hours ago in front of Awan House. Miral was weeping. Afterall, she was about to lose everything. She was a sister having a heart of gold for his only beloved brother. Fareed Awan was scolding guards for not being with Ashar. “Sir, he was out for a walk alone. He didn’t want anyone to come along with him.” The guard gave an excuse. Fareed Awan gave his mobile to his secretary who was also there. “Go and control the media.”

Miral’s eyes were placed on that emergency room where doctors inside were trying to save Ashar’s life. She was praying to Allah to grant him a life. A life with a good health! Tears were unstoppable.

Just when a doctor came outside the emergency room. “I am so sorry; we couldn’t save him.” Miral Fareed felt like she could hear nothing as if she was deaf. “We couldn’t save Ashar Fareed. We are sorry for your loss.”

Miral’s tears were still coming out but they were hopeless now. Will anything even get better? How will it even get better? Who will handle the rest now? Who will hold us together? Who will be a family to Miral? Miral sat down on

the bench and placed her eyes on floor. The tears were dropping down on the palm of her hand. Ashar was gone. Her brother, her strength was gone. He was no more in this world. Ashar was gone!

She remained silent! What was the need to say anything now? There was no need. She didn't scream and shouted. She was silent! She was silently crying. Silent tears were unstoppable and unfinishable. Now, they were for lifetime. Mourning.

Their childhood flashbacks were hitting hard in her memory when Ashar used to teach him some great and unforgettable lessons of life. He was a teacher, a mentor, a brother, a friend and everything to her. He was the world to her!

Once Miral asked him about the flowers, he always gave her as a present and he replied; "Look, Miral, it's always about making small and cherished efforts for others. If you have people around you, who value you and do small efforts for you, hold

them close because chances are that you will never find such people again in your life."

She was still silently looking at the wet palms of her hand, sometimes the floor and sometimes the emergency room's door where behind the doors, the dead body was left only, without a soul. Somebody was consoling her but she was still looking back at her childhood.

Then, those school days when Miral was bullied by her class fellows for being part of a broken family, just after the separation of her parents, Ashar used to encourage her to stand up against the world and to face this society. "Don't value them or their stupid words. Let them do what they want to do. Growing might feel like breaking at first. Remember, I am always there for you. You'll see me supporting you forever, no matter what. I promise."

All those promises had gone without being fulfilled. Then, what's the need of making promises when every time, they

will go uncompleted and unfulfilled. What's the need of making someone hopeful about something?

Fiona was there consoling her. Abeer also came. She was crying. She came to Miral to hug and console her. She knew how important Miral was, to Ashar Fareed.

She looked back at those days when they went for a vacation to northern side of Pakistan. How happy they were! They were a complete family that time! Fareed Awan, Aliya Fareed, Ashar and Miral; four of them were happy and splendid. Moreover, they were satisfied. Satisfaction of life is much necessary. They were out for hiking one day when Miral said to Ashar; "Can you bring me those yellowish flowers?" He immediately plucked the flowers and placed them on the side of Miral's black hairs. She smiled at him, thanking him contentedly.

"Now, every day I'll bring you flowers." He said while walking ahead, holding the umbrella as it was drizzling. They were behind their parents.

“Why?” Miral was curious to know the reason. “To see your beautiful smile every day.” He looked at Miral who was walking beside him and proudly smiling which ultimately was converted into a massive laughter as he cracked a joke.

Back to that gloomy night, she was sitting and still looking at the wet palms of her hand. Tears were still in flow. There was no resilience. Now, crying for that one precious man has to be continued till this life ends. What else could they do? This life will surely get its ultimate ending. You just need to wait for your end and till then, you need to play your perfect role in this world of eternity.

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After three days:

It was midnight. She was in Ashar’s room. A room full of darkness. An empty one which was owned by somebody who was generous and brave but his life was short. It ended up like a roller coaster ride. It was a tragic end! An end on which nobody could believe. And the one who

believes would never forget that one person who sacrificed his precious life for a big purpose.

Miral was standing in front of his wardrobe. She opened the sliding door of the cupboard. Inside, there were shirts of only three colors; black, grey and white. No other color! He was part of the corporate world where only these colors were considered as sophisticated ones. But now, nothing matters! No more sophisticated behavior required now. Everything ended up soon for Ashar Fareed. Miral took out a white buttoned shirt. She couldn't feel, when tears came out from the eyes, when she sat on the floor and for how long she wept. This was all in an instant. She could feel the mesmerizing fragrance of his 'Itar' in his shirt. Then, she hanged the shirt back. He looked at his wrist watches. He was fond of making a huge collection of wrist watches. All expensive and branded. But who's going to wear them now? Half of the collection was gifted by Miral on his birthdays and several other occasions.

After one week:

She was standing alone in the balcony when Shehzil came.

“Are you okay?”

“Why do everyone ask me if I am okay or not?” Miral looked frustrated. Tired maybe!

“They all care about you, sweetheart.” She tried to bring up a smile on her face.

“I am going!” Miral informed her about her next step.

“Where?” Shehzil was astonished. A super natural reaction!

“I want to go to graveyard, I want to go, visit Ashar’s grave. Please, don’t refuse me. One time, just, only one time. I will never ever insist again. Please!” She was not crying but that wetness and heaviness was there in her voice. “I lost my brother. I have nothing left behind. He was my secret partner, my travel partner, somebody has killed him, murdered him. I can’t do anything. I feel like, I am the most helpless person on this planet. All ego has gone. Everything shattered! Nothing left but only tears. What else can I desire?”

She was trying to light up her heart as it was carrying a massive burden these days.

After one month approximately:

"Ashar Fareed's murder file has been closed. We can't take any risk."

Fareed Awan was sitting in the lounge along with his lawyer and some other officials of Artistic Holding. Miral accidently heard the phrase which was said by the so-called lawyer of their family. **"Ashar Fareed's murder file has been closed."** Miral was astonished to hear this that his brother's case file was being closed. It was a murder. It was taken up so lightly. Even, her father, Fareed Awan was clearly okay with the decision. No objections! Everything will have to be forgotten and the reason was that Fareed Awan can't handle any risk! What shit this was! And this was the point when Miral promised herself. The promise! A big one! A goal to be accomplished! A purpose of life, that too dangerous one. It wasn't easy but she will! Not now, but soon! And the promise that she made to herself would

change herself and her personality, maybe her life completely.

After two months:

The evening time was about to settle as the sun was about to set. She was in her room, sitting on the floor mat and writing in her diary! The room lights were on. She was alone. She rarely goes out from her house due to security reasons and the other reason was that she prefers to be alone at home, now. Every tragic event brings a change in one's personality and Miral was experiencing a change too. But a bigger change has to arrive sooner. She used to spend more time with Fareed Awan now. Her mother also came at the time of funeral from Islamabad and left after four days as she herself was having her family in Islamabad. She started writing in her diary.

"I used to think that I am really strong, but in this time from which I am going through, I felt that I am not much stronger.

A lot has to be endured to become a strong personality. I learned a lot from Ashar's death. I

learned that how you feel when you lose your loved one! It felt really bad, very hurtful, very unbelievable. I can't believe that Ashar has gone and it's been sixty days almost.

It feels like your heart has been cut into many pieces, like your chest is bleeding until your red blood is strained out of your body.

It feels like you are being burned alive into the fire and you are helpless to get out of that. You feel like you are lost, you are alone, you have nothing left, no purpose of life, no desires, no dreams, no ambitions left behind.

But this all has taught me so much; it taught me that there is no reason of showing your emotions and your tears to this world. For this world, you are a heartless creature, you can't hide or even demonstrate what you feel. How unethical!

I was failed this time to hide my feelings from that one heartless person having light brownish eyes, I

was failed to hide my tears, I was failed every time to hide my emotions, to hide my traits.

But now, you will see a different me. I promise when I return, I'll be a different Miral, beyond your expectations.

I will make Ashar proud of me. He always wanted me to be strong enough to face this society. I will be! But I need time. I need a break from these people, from this society. I need to go away from 'Fareed House'. I really need to go!

Everybody used to say that I have changed within time, especially after finishing my college but now, they will see a different 'me' and then, that statement that 'Miral has changed' will be justified."

This pain is killing me from inside, the pain that Ashar is no more, the pain that he is not around me or near me, there's nobody now to hand over me those beautiful scented flowers every day just

to see me smiling. He's not there to encourage me in my difficult time.
I need time to gather courage and to face these people. To face them, those heartless beasts who killed my brother. For sure, it was preplanned. Everything was planned.
From now on, I will plan and they will see."
She closed her diary and stared out from the nearby window silently. *Silence!*

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They were in a small sports complex building, engaged in playing basketball. During the drinks break, Carl and Zaid sat together to have a few words conversation. "Dude, you played really well!" As usual, the conversation was started by the extrovert 'Carl'.
"I am always inclined towards sports!" Zaid said without looking at him. This time, he wanted to inquire about somebody. He didn't see or meet Miral since Ashar's death. He already knew how important Ashar was to her. He

didn't even try to meet her. "How's Miral?" Carl looked at him with some unusual reaction but then understood that why Zaid was asking this.

"She's better now! Dishearten! It was a big lose for her. But you know, it takes much time to heal." Healing takes time. For sure!

"Have you met her?" He was highly sweated. But he looked concerned.

"One day, I went to meet her, I was expecting that she would either refuse or be angry but eventually, she met me. But..." Carl was an actor. An actor with tantrums.

"But?" Curious.

"She was silent. She didn't speak much. Her eyes used to sparkle before this incident. But now, everything was dull in her eyes." Truth spitted out like a hot rock.

The drink breaks were over and their teammates were calling them to resume the game. Zaid went back to the game but with the idea of what to do next. He was cleared about his plan.

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That day, she was in her home's library which she made herself in the basement. She looked at multiple money-making books. That were, off course, Ashar's taste in books, being a part of corporate world. Well, she used to read fiction and biographies more often. Ashar was part of the corporate world and he always suggested Miral to go for some non-fictions too. But now, there were no suggestions from his side as there was no Ashar Fareed. Miral was drowned into her thoughts when somebody interrupted her thoughts.

"Miss Miral, somebody came to meet you." Fiona knocked and entered the basement's library.

"Who?" She asked without turning back. This time, she didn't want to meet anyone.

"He said, his name is Zaid Jahangir." Miral's eyes widened with a strange spark in them as if the solid ice has melted somewhere. An unexpected, unforeseen arrival.

She put the book back in the book rack and went to see that particular guest in the living room. Fortunately, Fareed Awan wasn't at home. It was a weekday and Zaid already knew that he must be at his workplace. This was the best time for him to visit Miral. Zaid didn't come here at Fareed House for the first time, he came here before as well in that party which was held a few months ago. He came at the party as Ashar invited him. They both knew each other for a very long time.

Today, he was here at Fareed House without any invitation but with a reason to meet Miral. But he didn't have any idea that he is going to regret his decision of coming here and meeting Miral Fareed.

He saw Miral reaching him slowly like an invisible force pushing her unwillingly. She was looking different, maybe because she wasn't dress-up the way, she always used to. She was wearing a simple plum colored long shirt with same colored straight trouser without any makeup.

"Hi Miral." He started the conversation after Miral settled down on the sofa.

“Why are you here?” She clearly didn’t want to greet him back.

“I wanted to meet; you even didn’t visit café in the past few days.” He ignored; greetings weren’t important for him.

“Were you curious? Oh, let me guess, you couldn’t focus on your particular purpose. Right?” She looked fierce in her tone.

“Miral, what are you talking about? I am unable to understand.” Zaid spoke out of perplexity.

“Oh, really, don’t tell me that you can’t understand. You are smart enough. An intelligent man who always think about himself, his own benefits and purposes.” She was rude somehow!

“You are still angry over me! I shouldn’t come here.” He regretted.

“Yes, exactly, you shouldn’t come here to meet a stranger. Right?” Miral was changed, the world was right.

“I’m sorry for what happened to your brother. And I am sorry for what happened in between us.” He couldn’t say anything else than to assure his purpose of coming here.

“Don’t show your sympathies. No pity! You shouldn’t be sorry because I don’t need your apology.” Frustrations were coming out in the form of fearless words.

“I can understand that you are frustrated at the moment, that’s why, I won’t feel bad about your spoken words.”

“At least, be fixed to your words, Zaid. Earlier, you said that you can’t accept us because I am daughter of Fareed Awan and now, you are sitting here at Fareed House, talking to his daughter, Miral Fareed.”

“You should forget about it.” Zaid was uncomfortable from inside.

“I never forget! Especially, all the bad memories never vanish from my mind.” She was speaking ruthless truth.

“Then, you’ll be in trouble.” Zaid warned her.

“I won’t regret being in.” She was already ready to not give up.

“Time for me to go!” Zaid stood up from the sofa. “I am so sorry for wasting up your time, Miss Miral Fareed.”

“And I am sorry for not offering you coffee or something else.” Miral didn’t stand. She was still sitting on the sofa.

Zaid looked at her for few seconds and spoke last words before departing out from Fareed House. “You have changed Miral.”

“Not my fault that I have changed!” She still was looking at an invisible point as she didn’t want to look at him, at his light brownish eyes. It wasn’t easy. It was never easy looking at those light brownish eyes. Zaid had gone. She was still in the living room. This time, she saw Zaid from the big glass windows of the living room, leaving ‘Fareed House’.

“I am sorry, Zaid but I can never forget, how you hurt me, broke my heart, just because... I am daughter of Fareed Awan. It was a big cost; I had to pay for being the daughter of Fareed Awan. It was much expensive and difficult. Letting you go was never easy. But I am not that rich to buy your heart and your emotions for myself. Hopelessly, we are still strangers!” She spoke to her heart.

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She already had decided her next move. “Miral, what are you saying?” Fareed Awan was at his study when Miral entered and busted up her new decision. “Yes, dad, I want to go out. I am going to Harward Law School for completing my studies. Please, don’t stop me. I applied there before Ashar’s death and now, I am selected. I can join the university now.”

“I won’t stop you. Off course. But make sure, you will return after completion of your degree.”

“Don’t worry, I will have to come back here in Pakistan. But before that, let me complete my higher studies to ensure a secure career for myself.”

“It would be a good change for you. I am supporting you!” Oh! Ashar used to be her supporter and now... Fareed Awan! What a change.

“Thank you, Dad!”

She went out of the house but with a bodyguard who accompanied her to the nearby park where Ashar used to go for night walk, where he went the last time for never returning back again. She sat on a bench looking at the far

away moon light which was covering a long distance, a distance which was there in between her and Zaid. The distance that was never going to be covered in between two strangers.

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“I just heard that you are going abroad.” Carl was curious about Miral always. They used to hate each other but always talked and discussed things and matters like true friends, suggesting each other with some good ideas, even taunting and criticizing each other on different viewpoints. They were both strange in their own aura! That was their aura!

“Yes. Are you upset?” Miral was sarcastic these days.

“Oh! I will be in peace once you leave this land.”

“Really! I feel like, you will miss my existence here at Artistic Holding.”

Carl wanted to say ‘that’s right!” but he can never satisfy Miral’s ego and hurt his own. But he could only ask

another question to satisfy his query. “Why are you going? Just for your degree or to get rid of all of us, I mean Zaid…”

“I want to get over all of this. I want a new startup. To fulfill my plans, I must go out, anywhere, but I can’t breathe in this environment. I can’t ensure my freedom here. I must go and get the exposure. But it has nothing to do with Zaid. Clear?”

“Are you missing Ashar?” Carl’s next question!

“I miss him every single day. I miss him at every family dinner. But I also know that he’ll never return back. Gradually, I am accepting this worst reality. Slowly and gradually. He was the best brother in the world.” She wanted to go to her room and cry alone. She was Miral Fareed, she couldn’t cry in front of this world, in front of Carl or Zaid or Fareed Awan.

“Where are you going by the way? I mean which place?”

“Cambridge, Massachusetts.” She replied. Nothing more to hide now.

“Where will you stay there in **Cambridge, Massachusetts**?”

“I wanted to stay in hostel but dad didn’t want, so, I will stay at my uncle’s rented house.”

“Take care, Miral!” Miral smiled a bit. Well, Carl was busy again on his laptop.

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Tomorrow was her flight to **Cambridge, Massachusetts.** From next week, her classes were about to start. Another busy schedule to look forward to. Going to law school was her aim but it was more persuaded by Ashar to do whatever she aimed to do. She was satisfied because she was doing what she wanted to do. Her dad wanted her to permanently join Artistic Holding but then, supported Miral in her law career.

She was packing her stuff. It was a busy day. She hasn’t met Zaid after that day, when he last visited Fareed house. She was going to meet Shehzil to the café where she was regarded as a regular customer. She went to the café after many months. “Finally, you are here, Miral.” Shehzil was already there. “Are you done with all the stuff?”

“Yes, almost.”

“When will you return?”

“I will visit dad in semester breaks.” They were both conversating when she saw Zaid coming out from café’s kitchen. Even, at the same time, Zaid also saw Miral. Miral was about to leave when someone interrupted in between her walk lane. “So, you are going abroad.”

“Yes!”

“Another escape!”

“Escape! Good thoughts but I am going for my degree completion.” She cleared.

“You are escaping again, Miral.” Zaid’s gaze were still fixed on her face.

“I don’t feel like escaping. Why will I escape? Will I have to escape from you?”

“No, I didn’t say that. Accept my good luck.” He smiled a bit on her confidence.

“Accepted!” Miral looked at her phone which was ringing. She put her phone on silent mode. “Now, you may focus on your purposes. Right?” She said coldly. Zaid couldn’t reply

back. He made her heart cold. He was the reason. He was blaming himself for all that change in her personality. She was in a hurry to say goodbye and leave. Letting go everything behind. Zaid could only see her going, maybe for the last time.

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Her ride to the airport from Fareed house was more of rewinding back memories. She was leaving Karachi for about two years. She was relaxed but memories hit hard. Those beautiful memories with Ashar.

"Ashar, where were you? You know, how tensed I was, just because of you."

"Why are you upset my dear?"

"Miral, my dear, calm down." His words were like putting feet in a cold lake and relaxing your soul.

"I am going to fight a case against corrupt people. I am standing against corruption in this country."

"I am hopeful about winning this case."

“Miral, stop, you are not weak at all. Be strong. You are strong to face any thunderstorm in your life, no matter what. You are strong because you are Miral Fareed. You are my sister! Ashar Fareed’s sister!”

“Miral, trust me, I’ll fix everything.”

“Yes, that’s the reality. Sacrificing your life is the biggest amount that only people with big hearts would pay.” Sacrifice. That was a big word he spoke to Miral and he even made it a reality. She can never forget Ashar, even not after going away from the house where they lived, even not being away from the country. This wasn’t easy to get rid of all the timeline’s memory.

“Goodbye but this is not the end to my story. It has much more to say. Much more. Even more than I thought it will say.”

After the all the procedure at airport, she was in the plane which was about to take off in a minute. A new life to **Cambridge, Massachusetts.** She was going to occupy

her dream career but excitement wasn't up to that state. She arrived at the airport to leave this country for...

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"Who are you?" Fareed Awan asked for confirmation as he already identified who he was. He was standing in front of him. Who was he? A culprit or just a... It was his office where Zaid came to meet him to confront something. Something big. Something mysterious. After seeing Zaid at the party and then, around Miral, Fareed Awan inquired about him. He got to know everything about him. His background, his family, about his café and bank accounts. Almost everything which was important. He was trying hard to change his lifestyle, to earn more money and to bring up a massive change. He owned a café at the prime location. He was a freelancer as well. And moreover, he was Ashar's friend.

"I am Zaid Jahangir. Remember?" He didn't sit down on the guest chair. Emotionless tone and so were the eyes.

“How can I forget?” Fareed Awan was calm or maybe he was a good actor.

“Unexpectedly. I wasn’t expecting you to remember anything about me.” Zaid was trying to analyze his expressions.

“What is your purpose?” He was looking at him with blank eyes. He didn’t offer him to settle down.

“You must know about it.” Zaid wasn’t afraid at all. Why should he be terrified? Why? Not this time.

“Actually…” Zaid interrupted in between. He hated this person since his childhood. Maybe hate was a tiniest word.

“I was saying that do you remember that my father Jahangir Ayub was one of the investors of your company? But when he was bank corrupt, you didn’t help him. You didn’t help. You were quite arrogant. I feel like, it suits you, you never cared about anyone, even not about your family. Then, why will you care about an ordinary investor? Right?”

“Don’t talk about my family. I am glad that you stayed away from Miral.” He was on his power seat. His eyes were emotionless.

“I stayed away because she is your daughter. She didn’t exist in this world to clear all the mess that you have created. She’s not innocent but I think she hates you.” He was ruthless. Ruthless by heart!

“Shut up! Just shut up! Enough you may leave or else I will call the security.” Fareed Awan was harsh this time, his voice pitch was high. His words throwing fire and lingering.

“Wait, Fareed Awan. I have waited for so long to face your anger. I know you would react harder but I want to have this confrontation. It was my purpose to let you know about whatever you did. The list is long but I briefly told you. It’s only the start to our conversation so, just keep calm and enjoy the rest.” He smiled while looking at his color changing face. “Relax, I am going. But don’t try to shut me up or destroy anything around me. I won’t

tolerate. Goodbye!" He left the room and Fareed Awan in a very bad mode.

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This was a darkroom looking like a massive conference room. There was only one bulb which was blinking and a laptop which was spreading its light on the face of man who was on the power seat. "Nobody else in your way, Peter pan." The man in black suit standing, said in a spot voice. Looks like they were discussing something in code wording. Peter pan was not his real name for sure.

"Good! Any other obstacle." The man on the power seat in that dark room said in a heavy voice.

"Only Ashar Fareed was the obstacle and he is no more as per the plan."

"Perfect. What about his murder case?"

"It has been closed already."

"Means Fareed Awan is smart enough. Smart brains."

Peter pan looked impress.

“He is not smart; he only wants money and power. That’s it.” The man in black suit informed.

“Weakness. He’s weak then. Not as strong as Ashar Fareed. Ashar was a good competent.”

“Now, no need to keep an eye on him. Now, leave! One more night dedicated to the depressing death of Ashar Fareed.”

“Okay Peter pan. We’ll execute our next plan, next month. Be ready!” His face was already in dark that no one could identify his facial expressions and features. Peter pan has entered or maybe he has already entered before the timing. The room was still dark like a graveyard. Like dark stormy night. Hopeless darkness. Dark like their dark plans.

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“Here you go. How are you feeling now?” The guy wearing a white coat asked her gently, in a soft tone.

“Better now. The wound has healed.” She informed the man in white coat.

“Good for you. Will you return back?” Another question was asked.

“No, I won’t return now. I have got some purposes to fulfill now.” She looked ambitious.

“Miral, it’s been five years now. Isn’t that grateful for you and your family that you must move on and heal.”

“Healing…” Her tone was sarcastic. “How can I heal? Is that very easy? I want only one thing and that is justice. I want justice. I need to go back for that and you won’t stop me. Please! Don’t stop me. I was weaker before but now I am not. Miral Fareed is never a weaker competent.”

“I can understand but still…”

“Please, can you wish me good luck?” She stood up from the sofa.

“Yeah sure, good luck beautiful.”

“I won’t say thanks this time.” She was in a hurry now.

Why so?

It’s been about five years in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Fareed Awan insisted her to spend her holidays or

vacations in Pakistan but she always refused him. “Dad, I’m sorry but I don’t want to come now.”

She used to live alone and explore around. She didn’t make much friends there. She even contacted a psychologist for therapy as she needed healing. She was much comfortable, talking to her psychologist without any hesitation. Sometimes talking to a stranger or a third person, without any fear of being judged is better than talking to a very close friend who knows everything about you already. She used to discuss all her past traumas, her broken family, about her brother who was murdered, about her dreams that were built in by her brother. She was ambitious even now as well. Days were passing like a water stream through mountains, very fast but smoothly. She healed but never forget those days when she lost her brother. She never forget her brother, Ashar Fareed. It was never easy to wrap all those memories and put them in dump. It was much difficult. She wasn’t carrying a big heart in her chest. She looked strong but still she was too, a girl with soul, enduring emotions and heightened feelings.

Finally, now after the completion of her higher studies, she was ready to return back to Pakistan. She always dreamt of how it would be to go back there again. This time, only her father would be excited to meet her, even though he had got his own massive empire but still he missed his daughter. He even, insisted multiple times for Miral's return but she was stubborn for sure. But this time, intentionally, she was returning. Yes, with an intention! The heart beats, whispering only these words! "Museum of a failure or gallery of trying?" The fate commented it was all the art of beautiful revenge! The art of trying hard! The art of returning back! Miral Fareed was ready!

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"All the arrangements are done, Mr. Fareed Awan." Carl was already sitting in board's meeting room along with Fareed Awan when event manager entered the room and informed about the arrangements.

"Oh good! There should be nothing left. Finally, my daughter is returning after five years. The party should be

great. Invite everyone out there. Nobody should be left. Send invitations to every important person." Carl could see the brightening face of Fareed Awan which lightened up every time.

"Sir, seems like you are very happy." He shut down his laptop and was looking straight at Fareed Awan's excited face.

"Yes, I am! Miral is coming back finally." Carl could only give a cringe look to his cringe thoughts. "The disaster named Miral Fareed is returning!" Carl thought sadly.

On the other side, it was Miral's flight day. It was a long flight and the wait was longer too. What goes back were the memories only left up in chaos like a presage, a true warning or sign to remember always. Some imminent things are always unforgettable memories that would vanish and empty your heart but fill up your mind with some negative energies. Miral was coming back but this time with a purpose. She was intellectually and somewhat emotionally stronger than before, that is what she used to think.

She finally landed in Pakistan, on her homeland in the heated afternoon of April. She was wearing a black tracksuit with black glasses and a hand carry. Her luggage was in the cargo. Fareed Awan's driver came to pick her as Mr. Fareed was busy in his important and urgent meeting with new business dealers.

"Where is Mr. Fareed?" She asked the driver.

"Madam, he is in Artistic Holding for a meeting."

"Well, so we are going to Artistic Holding then." She passed the order and was about to move towards the car when a voice from behind stopped her.

"Welcome back, Miss Miral Fareed Awan." How can Miral couldn't remember this voice? Was this possible? No! It surely was impossible! Impossible!

"Oh, so you are here too, I guess you came to pick me up! Wow!" Her tone automatically shifted into sarcastic ton in the end. Carl smiled, a big open smile.

"Oh, Miral, aren't you happy? Look, I was so excited to come to pick you from the airport that I couldn't refuse my boss and also had to miss my important meeting!"

“As if I care! And yes, I am not happy to see you here.” She came near Carl, bent near his ear and whispered slowly.

“Well, it’s too hot today, we should leave!”

“Well, we are going home, not Artistic Holding.” Carl passed the order. But was he allowed? Absolutely not. Not in front of Miral in any case!

“Did I ask you? No need of your advice! And don’t poke your nose in my matters!” Miral said n a normal tone while there was something changed in her personality. Carl noticed a change but was unable to identify it or give that change an appropriate name.

The whole route, Miral rewind thousands of memories in her head. She was not able to concentrate on what Carl was saying because he was constantly talking to the driver while sitting on the front seat. How talkative! How irritating!

Exaggerated memories fall back. **Will anything even get better? How will it even get better? Who will handle the rest now? Who will hold us together? Who will be a family to Miral?**

She used to think about this all after Ashar Fareed died. That night was a crossroad. That one night changed everything! **Silent tears were unstoppable and unfinishable. Now, they were for lifetime. Mourning. Their childhood flashbacks were hitting hard in her memory when Ashar used to teach him some great and unforgettable lessons of life. He was a teacher, a mentor, a brother, a friend and everything to her. He was the world to her! He was Miral's Ashar Fareed.**

But Miral's journey never ended. Indeed, it has started now. A fearless journey, a journey full of abrupt decisions to be taken, a journey with a lot more challenges. This was a beginning only. An initial start-up!

The car stopped and her thoughts vanished off too. she came back to reality. The massive crystal and glass walled building was in front standing brutally with full power and dominancy. She came out of the car and went inside without concerning about Carl. The doorkeeper, another security guard, receptionist, managers, employees,

assistants, line managers, sweepers, lower staff, almost everyone looked back at Miral while she was going towards the meeting room but nobody could stop her. This was true that this time, no one could stop her! After all, she was the daughter of company's president. Maybe, the next boss of Artistic holding in future.

She deliberately entered the meeting room where the meeting was held. "Good afternoon, everyone!" Her delicate voice spread and smashed the walls and every corner of the meeting room. Fareed Awan was in a shock, but just for a while and then emotions transformed rapidly; Shock, surprise, astonishment, happiness and then finally, gladness. What else could a father feel out of joy and peace after seeing his only daughter after years of loneness! "Miral, what a present surprise!" His tone reflected his thirst of joy. He stood from his power seat and came near Miral to greet and hug her. "I wasn't expecting you to be here."

"Sorry, for interrupting your meeting but I wanted to come here so I couldn't stop myself."

“No worries.” He turned towards rest of the audience, or better say towards other employees of Artistic Holding and his new investors who were present there too. He was about to introduce his daughter like a proud father and he started saying, “Attention everyone, I would like to introduce my daughter, she is Miral Fareed Awan.” Every single eye was on Miral Fareed. She holds a kind of personality that attracts everyone due to her dynamic charm which her presence holds.

Miral Fareed could only pass smile. “Miral meet our new investors, Mr. Talha Baig.” Fareed Awan pointed at an intelligent and smart man sitting on the power seat of the meeting room. Talha Baig, remember the name! Talha Baig was an iconic business man with much power, influence and fame across the country and was recognized globally as well because of his multiple shares in different multinational corporations. He was handsome, smart, elegant and intelligent. “Your daughter looks so elegant and beautiful.” He complimented Miral in his first meeting with her, directly in front of everyone. He was much direct

with his words and never cared about the stereotypes and societal taboos. He was a man of power, why would he care about other's mentality? Very direct, yet very explicit. Talha Baig. Man of extreme intelligence. Miral didn't like the compliment as she didn't like praises for herself. She was direct too and could have replied if Carl hasn't interrupted in between. "Miss Miral, I think we should go home so that Mr. Fareed can continue the meeting, I mean, you must be tired." Miral was already very serious after getting an unexpected compliment from a stranger named 'Talha Baig' but Carl also triggered her after passing another order. Miral felt that it was an order from Carl which was of course unacceptable for her. If it would be any other social setting, scenario or any other situation, then she would have bluntly answered this annoying Carl but she tried to calm herself down and finally decided to leave. "See you dad." She said and get out of the room, leaving Talha Baig in an awe because he was expecting a very cheerful thank you from her side. The girl surprised

Talha Baig from her attitude which was part of her grace. This was admitted by Talha Baig.

The man sitting beside him in black suit whispered in his ears, “Peter pan, you need to sign these papers.” The man in black suit revealed a thing. A matter of thrill to be revealed here. Yet here! Peter pan. Talha Baig. Revealing truth between these two. A secretive tone hindered by unraveling truth. The man in black suit handed over the pen and papers, read some pointers loudly, Talha signed the papers and deal was done with shaking hands. Another deal with Fareed Awan or better say with Artistic Holding. Talha Baig was successful in his plans as always. But Peter pan hold much more evil plans in his evil genius mind as expected. Evil genius.

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“What is hope?” A feminine voice appeared from other side of the call.

“Hope is a reflex action of goodness.” Zaid Jahangir’s cold and serious voice started saying.

“Elaborate more.” The feminine voice repeated this phrase.

“When we do good with others, they expect more good or even better from us. A hope is there built there inside them. That constructed hope is very dominating that they want more goodness from our side.”

“When we fail to show more goodness, then what happens?” Another question from the girl’s side.

“We humans can never indulge into goodness all the time, we can’t afford doing food all the time, just like we can’t afford doing bad all the time. This is vice versa. We are sometimes neutral. We love being neutral in almost every case. We are unable to decide that whether to opt for a pure and clear pathway which may lead us towards goodness or to go for unclear routes having many hurdles. We chose difficulties for ourselves, that too deliberately. We want ease but still we choose difficult terms and conditions.”

“Zaid, you are an over thinker.” The girl confessed.

“No, not an over thinker, I am a contemplator.” Zaid confessed truth this time. Contemplation far better than

overthinking. Deeply thinking and analyzing things and matters was never a bad choice.

“Will you go there?”

“Yes, I must join that party. After all, Fareed Awan sent an invitation for Zaid Jahangir. How can I refuse to go there?”

“Miral Fareed is back.”

“I know that why is she back!”

“Why?”

“She is back for a purpose!”

“What purpose? Do you have any idea?”

“She is back for justice only. Her purpose is to attain justice.” No one can understand Miral Fareed more deeply and better than Zaid Jahangir, that girl named Amtul realized that. But still he knew that, Miral Fareed’s big deep eyes were not an easy read for him.

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The arrangements of the party showed how massive and big it was for the organizers. Fareed Awan didn't leave any sort of thing untouched. The obvious reason for that

massive party was "arrival of Miral Fareed" but the second most important and hidden reason was the announcement of a partnership deal with Talha Baig. Fareed Awan's proud nature couldn't stop him from showing people his nature of showcasing his dominance, his power and his influence. But despite having that power, he couldn't save his only son, Ashar Fareed. Unfortunate! Very unfortunate! He couldn't protect him.

Miral was in her room, getting ready for the party. She was dressed up in a plum-colored long attire with silver earrings, light makeup but whole marks for her beautiful smoky eye makeup which she always loved doing in all important events. She looked excited, even though she was tired after that hectic flight and that encounter at Artistic holding. But still, she looked excited. She was here for a purpose! She was ambitious! For the first time, she was about to attend a party held in Awan house without Ashar Fareed. As for every second, this time again, she was missing the one to whom her world revolves around. Miral Fareed was missing Ashar Fareed badly! He was the entire

family for her but today, he was not with Miral. He wasn't there! That was a bitter reality which actually exhausts every time, every second, every minute!

Miral looked frustrated after all her sick thoughts and she went towards the balcony of her room. She looked up at the sky, at the moon, at those sparkling stars which were glowing. Every time, you look up at the sky, it really feels like your loved ones are looking at you, admiring you from a distance of a million miles. Miral felt the same. She felt like Ashar Fareed was always there to support her. His body left this world but his soul never departed. She smiled looking up at the sky. A deep breath was taken. She was strong, she reminded herself! She was trying or pretending to be strong, she never knew, never got an idea. Was Miral Fareed a pretender? Was she pretending to be a strong girl? Was she strong enough to attain her purpose?

She never knew what was going to be her next step. But she was ready! Her eyes glowed brightly with hope. What was hope? Hope... hope is a reflex action of goodness! She heard this line somewhere and found it to be correct.

Certainly, she was the girl to oscillate between darkness and lightness of life. Probably, she was the girl to create all the glory in her own way. Fortunately, she was the girl to call herself 'lucky' for choosing the dimmy, shiny and gracious streets for the rest of her days. Luckily, she chose herself at last. She found herself! She was tired of her contemplating mind and then bent her glory eyes down.

Even the wonders of heart remain unbalanced,
that beauty to admire remains uncovered,
mesmerizing memorials in brain left over like a burdened stone,
that fascinating nature's miracle left us voiceless and dumb,
the heart skipped a beat while admiring the most unwanted thing,
even the heart questioned the mind,
if it really was a miracle of nature,
or just an illusion from the blackest of mindset,
the curiosity reached its peak point,
but was unable to find its way back,

the heart sparkled hard in a nut shell.

Was the heart surely sparkling or wondering?

She came back to her room, putting aside all her intrusive thoughts and sat on her couch for wearing her high heels. For the last time, she looked herself in the long mirror with judgmental eyes on her own self. Everything was perfect! Her dress, makeup, jewelry, high heels, everything looked excellently well. She was ready! Perfectly ready. She needs to go downstairs in order to join that party with a fake, constant pretending smile on her face. To move within this extraordinary and show off elite class was never an easy job. You need to become a pretender around your society. This is what all people does there. Even, Miral belonging to that class has to do that. Otherwise, a blink of someone's unusual behavior would clearly become the center point of someone's table and they would get another topic of gossiping. It's better to never give others any chance of gossiping. It's better for the peace of mind.

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The party was held in the massive backyard of Awan house. Poolside of the big castle like house was also consumed for the elite guests, especially invited by Fareed Awan. Carl was looking at all the arrangements and now, finally it was time for him to chill and enjoy the party with his most special ones.

The party began with its all shine and pride. All eyes were on Miral Fareed as she looked gorgeous, gabbing attention of all. She was staring that one guy with light brownish eyes unintentionally who came towards her intentionally. That 'tall and dark'. The one she met at the café for the first time. The one who was heartless for Miral Fareed. Indeed, he was! He was a stranger for Miral Fareed! He was Zaid Jahangir. Were they still strangers? The fate decided to make them strangers! But the heart and brain's limbic system decided to turn off that odd stranger mode! What's stranger than, when one has got a heart of butterflies and fire and the other one has got an emotionless brain with logic and rationality. But what comes in between was the 'ego'. The egoistic behavior of those two arrogant strangers.

“Welcome back, Miss Miral Fareed.” Those two light brownish eyelids were on Miral’s face. That ‘tall and dark’.
“Welcome to the party, Zaid.” Miral’s tone was completely emotionless but she had a calm smile on her face. Far away, two small, sharp and evil eyes were also staring at those two arrogant strangers. Peter pan was also invited especially by Fareed Awa, after all, Talha Baig was the new partner of Artistic Holding.
“How are you?” Zaid seemed to continue the conversation.
“I am alright.” Miral said splendidly.
“You seem so!” Zaid said in a dim voice.
“I heard about your engagement, congratulations for that!” Zaid was about to turn when Miral congratulated him for his engagement. Just when Carl entered and said, “Oh! Don’t you know Miral, his engagement is now no more. It’s broken! It’s over!” He whispered the last phrase in Miral’s ear. Miral was in shock. She clearly had no idea about this news. She only got to know about Zaid’s engagement but didn’t have any idea that now, it was broken too. She looked at Carl and then, at Zaid and could only say, “I am

sorry, I didn't know about it." She looked at Carl like she was saying that, "Can't you tell me earlier? I told you to keep me updated about everything." But could only whispered in his ears, "Why so late to update me, Mr. Carl?"

"Miss Miral, you always pay me late, did I ever complain you?" (Miral had made a deal with Carl for getting all the updates but it wasn't allowed to discuss that deal in public but what to say about Carl? He was surely an open and a loud mike!) Miral thought of saying something blunt but kept silent in front of Zaid. Zaid was watching that one minute drama between Miral and Carl. He looked uninterested in their conversation, so excused and went towards other guests.

"Your updates are always very late, Carl." After Zaid leaved, Miral said in a serious tone.

"Thank you for the compliment but kindly clear my dues as soon as possible, because I'm going through financial crisis in this country!" He said and blinked an eye.

"Financial crisis? You serious? I know what kind of financial crisis you are facing!" Miral said in a blunt manner as she was enjoying his helplessness. "I won't pay you because your update was incomplete and I felt embarrassed in front of Zaid just because of you, Carl." She said and without waiting for his answer, went away.

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“Who are you looking at, peter pan?” the man in black suit said in a lowest tone.

“I have told you that don’t call me ‘peter pan’ here. Just call me Sir Talha.” Talha Baig looked angry at his so-called P.A.

“Sorry, sir! Won’t happen next time!” P.A apologized immediately.

“The one in plum-colored dress, I want her complete details as soon as possible.”

“Oh! You are talking about Fareed Awan’s daughter?”

“Yes, I am talking about Miral Fareed.” He kept on staring her with an evil smile on his face. Just when, Miral also noticed that someone has kept an eye on her. She turned

back but everyone looked busy in their own businesses and chitchats. She also saw the new partner of his dad, Talha Baig who was also invited in the party as a very special guest. Oh, she doesn't get good vibes from this man. And Miral Fareed's gut feelings are never wrong. She could feel the negative vibes from this man. She doesn't know the reason. How could she? In the end, he was just another stranger for Miral Fareed.

Fareed Awan announced his partnership with Talha Baig proudly. Miral looked exhausted as she never liked these sorts of social gatherings. What an anti-social behavior this was! The night gradually proceeded but it wasn't ended yet. A lot more to go...

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The party was over. Miral Fareed was in her room now after a grumpy evening. She wasn't in her plum attire as she changed and got fresh. She looked in a new casual attire now and it was looking like she was going somewhere. Her eyes felt serious tiredness but she has

much to do. She went down, towards the car garage and asked the guard for the keys. “Give me the keys.” The guard looked strange but couldn’t refuse her because Miral has got convincing power. Her eyes were much convincing!
She was there in the park where only few of the people were there. “Why did you call me, Miral?”
“I wanted to meet you.”
“And why do you want to meet me?” Zaid Jahangir looked desperate.
“I wouldn’t exaggerate. I would like to come straight to my exact point.” Miral took a deep breath.
“Be direct then!” Zaid looked straight in her convincing eyes! How beautiful, deep and graceful those eyes were! His heart assured him.
“Okay then…” Miral waited for a second and then said, “I want Ashar Fareed’s case file to reopen again! You must know that I returned back here to Pakistan for only one purpose. I can’t wait more; I have already wasted much time. Five long years! They were literally too long but I had

to wait, because I was weak that time but now, I have gathered all courage and I want to fight for my brother."

"Miral, your brother can never come back. He left to never come back. Attaining justice for him or even, just fighting for him won't be easy and it wouldn't bring your brother back."

"Why don't you take his name?"

"What!"

"You always call him 'your brother', his name is Ashar Fareed."

"What do you want from me?"

"I know what can you do. I think I shouldn't repeat it here!"

"Am I trustworthy person?"

"No, you aren't! Miral Fareed never trust anyone! Remember that. There is no 'trust' word in my dictionary."

"Then, why are you here?" How direct he was!

"Zaid, I believe that trust is always gained. It's attained through hard work, through dedication and through intelligence." She pointed out at her forehead.

“Miral, it is dangerous!” Zaid warned her for the last time but he knew that Miral was now unstoppable. She was ready to risk her life for the sake of justice for her brother. She looked a different Miral Fareed to the world but Zaid knew that deep down, she was still worried about some matters and curious about her over thoughts.

“My brother was murdered that night. I have seen him, lying on the floor and covered with his own blood. Those gun shots and the devastating voice of those gunshots, I can never forget. And I will never forget. Those voices have traumatized me always. Those voices have haunted me always. That scene when doctor came out, just to tell us that ‘we couldn’t save Ashar Fareed’. I lost my brother; it felt like I have lost my whole family. It felt like someone has taken the knife to cut my vein. It was painful but I have learned to endure pain.” Miral Fareed was never too expressive but now, she was absolutely changed. There’s always an event in your life which may haunt you, traumatize you, change you and then finally, transform

you. They are like turning points of your life, like massive crossroads.

Miral continued speaking in that anonymous night, sitting on a bench while Zaid was standing nearby. "I know your purpose too, Zaid." Zaid was not shocked to hear those words from Miral. "I know that you came near Awan's family for your own revenge. I know that we were never strangers. You were the person who wanted to build that border between us so that you can conquer what you wanted." Her sarcastic tone was understandable for Zaid. "What do you want to say?"

"I really want to confess that I know that you were just here to take your childhood revenge from my father. I also know that my father became the reason for all the poverty, instability and financial problems that your family had to face. I know your father died because he couldn't get enough money from my father. He couldn't afford his treatment. He was at his last stage of cancer but my father didn't help him. He did wrong! I know, it was wrong. And for that wrong, you rejected Miral Fareed that day. That

day, you broke my heart, my heart shattered into pieces but now, I have no time to gather those pieces and fix them up. That day, you granted me the punishment of that sin which I didn't commit. You said, I am good but my only mistake is to be the daughter of Fareed Awan. You hated my father, the whole Awan family and maybe, you hated Miral Fareed too but now, literally, I don't care about these things. I have got some new tasks to complete, some new purposes to fulfill."

"Still, you think that I will help you. But why?" Zaid's tone was sarcastic.

"Yes, because we are not strangers. I know, it's a lame reason but still you know better that I am Miral Fareed, I am not like my father. You know well, I am Miral. Even, you broke my heart but I don't care about it. I have said earlier that I can't collect and fix those shattered pieces of my heart. I don't have that courage to do so!" Miral was confident, her eyes were shining and blooming in the dark night.

"Just like, you can't trust anyone, similarly, I can't trust Fareed Awan's daughter. Even, I can't trust this hypocrite world. But yes, we are not strangers, that's true."

In that dark night, two of those strangers were dealing with their own ambiguities. They were being expressive and direct in their own ways. Adulation! No discriminations, no misunderstandings; Just two strangers rewinding their extreme past events which changed their lives, which actually changed their personalities. Not all strangers are strange, some felt like they were always there for you, waiting impatiently for you, trying hard to get your valuable time. Some strangers turn out to be very interesting! Those two weren't strangers anyways.

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Let us enter that dark room where only two humans were present. One person looked busy working on his laptop and the other person was making coffee for that first person.

"What are these files about?" A serious voice emerged in that dark room.

"Peter pan, these all are the details of Miral Fareed."

"Oh... interesting!" He went through the file and through the portfolio of Miral which he opened in his laptop. Miral's pictures appeared on the screen. Talha Baig's eyes shined and a smile appeared on his face.

"She thinks that, Ashar Fareed has been murdered deliberately."

"She is smart."

"No, she is trying to be overconfident."

"She is a genius but who am I?" He turned back his chair towards the P.A. "I am an evil genius. No one can beat Talha Baig, you know why?"

P.A didn't reply back. He was there to listen to his boss.

"No one can beat me ever because I'm an evil genius. Moreover, let her think whatever she wants to think but we need to meet her."

"How can we meet her? Peter pan, she is very a moody girl, a spoilt elite class girl. She doesn't meet random people and those who are strangers to her."

"We will surely meet her. Wherever she wants and whenever we want. She will call us to meet, don't worry.

We will make a situation!" Peter pan eyes were shining as always. His glowing eyes already showed that he has got a plan. And Peter pan has always got a plan A, B and C and if these plans won't work out, then there is definitely a backup plan. "Bring me a coffee. I need to work the whole night."

"Means you won't sleep." Another dark night in that dark room.

“There are many secrets to discover!” He said with a smirky smile on his face. That night, Talha Baig really had to discover much. Let’s see what he finds out about Miral Fareed.

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It was a new day, having new goals, containing new motifs and new, unrevealed ideas. Miral came out wearing a decent lime color shirt with white trouser. She also wore glasses. She looked fresh. She came to the dining room for breakfast where Fareed Awan was already having his coffee. "Good morning, dad." Miral dragged the chair and

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settled down. Pour the juice in her glass and took a sip from it.

"Are you all good, now?"

"Yes, now I am all fresh. I was tired after the party but now I am alright."

"Miral, join Artistic holding." He said with a hope in his voice.

"I will think about it but I can't promise you." Miral was now busy eating omelet. She tried not to look in Fareed Awan's eyes.

"But I want to see you in Artistic holding, in my company." He insisted.

"Dad, you know better that you can't force me. I said, I will think about it and make a decision soon." Miral finally looked up straight in her dad's eyes.

"Fine. One more thing, stay away from Zaid Jahangir." Miral stopped for a minute but then continue finishing her omelet.

"Why?"

"Because I don't like him."

"Hmmm... you don't like him. Right! And I don't like your new partner, can you kick him out of your company."
"Are you talking about Talha Baig?" Fareed Awan was in a shock.
"I don't care, whatever his name is! But I don't like his personality. Just kick him out of your Artistic holding and I'll not meet Zaid again." Miral looked straight in his eyes, confidently.
"What nonsense, Miral." Fareed Awan was frustrated.
"This is not nonsense! If you feel it's, then don't force me to do what you think is right. Not every day, Fareed Awan can be right. Sometimes, Miral Fareed can be correct as well. I know who should be there in my life and who shouldn't be! And I feel like there's only one person left in this world, who can never harm me. Do you want to know his name?" She paused for a while, stood up and said in spot tone, "His name is Zaid Jahangir. He's the one who can never hurt me, I know him." Miral was about to leave the dining room when Fareed Awan's words stopped her feet.

"Right, he was the one who left you just because of me. Just because you are the daughter of Fareed Awan! Don't think, I don't know anything. I know everything about you, Miral. Don't worry, if you make mistakes, I'll cover them up, I'll be there for you, I'll be there to support you, neglecting all your mistakes. Because I'm your father and you are my daughter. You can judge me wrong but my child, I can never be judgmental about my own daughter. I will always protect you from societal eyes." He stopped for a while.

Miral turned back and said, "You said that, you will protect me. Did you protect Ashar?" She paused for a second. "No, you failed to protect him." She wasn't crying, her eyes were dry. Her face was emotionless. She looked heartless but the inner guilt was overflowing. A disgusting guilt of not being with your loved one, how disgusting! Contentment looks like a burden. Remaining unknown to certain things, not knowing about certain matters was a blessing. Unrevealed truths are better sometimes! She didn't stop and went outside as there was a lot of work to do. Well, Fareed Awan

stood there alone and silent. In the end, he was a father, he has to protect is children but he failed. Surely, he failed. There are many compulsions of parents that their children can never understand. How unfortunate!

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It was a beautifully designed, aesthetic cafe having small indoor and outdoor plants, decorated with fresh flowers on each table. The interior looked more gorgeous with one corner which was containing a book shelf and the other corner having attractive art pieces placed on the black wall. The wooden floor silently listened to the upcoming and ongoing footsteps of multiple customers as the cafe looked silent, a comfortable place for people to start their days. Miral was waiting for that "tall and dark" to appear soon. She was sitting on a table with a glass wall. She could clearly see the outside view which showed green plants all over and a few tables containing umbrellas at the upper end to secure people from hot scorching sunlight. She was typing something on her mobile when that 'tall and dark' appeared and sat on the front chair of her table. "You are

10 minutes late, Zaid." Miral said in a spot tone. She tried to look normal but her eyes never lied. "The traffic of this city is ridiculous." Zaid Jahangir gave a reasonable excuse.
"Well, why did you call me?" Miral initiated the talk.
"Because I wanted to meet you." Zaid said in a spot tone.
"Okay. What was the need of meeting me?"
"Are you sure about reopening Ashar's file case?" Zaid was direct. In fact, this morning, he directly took Ashar's name. What a change! Explicit!
"I think, I have cleared my point of view that night."
"I know and I said, it's dangerous, in fact it's risky as well. Ashar Fareed and your father's enemies are very strong." Zaid's eyes hold a kind of frightening emotion. What was that emotion all about? Was he worried for Miral Fareed? Was he concerned about his own wealth? Was he trying hard to convince Miral of taking a step back? Miral's mind was jumbled up with multiple questions and reasonings. But Miral could only say, "I know it's risky. Whenever, you go out on a platform to take revenge, it's an obligation to build up two graves. One of the graves for your enemy and

the other one for your own self. Remember my words. I am not afraid of death anymore. It used to scare me before but now, I am not having anything to lose! I have got nothing. Look in my eyes, do I look fearless?"

Miral stopped and looked silently at Zaid's face. "Okay, I got it." Zaid could only say this. He ordered two black coffees. Miral stopped the waiter and corrected the order placed by Zaid. "Bring two cappuccinos instead of black coffee." The waiter noted the order again. Miral looked at Zaid and said in a lower voice, "Already this life is very bitter, then why to go for bitter black coffee." Her mood looked good now. She was relaxed. Zaid realized that she had changed more than he expected. She was changed for a reason or maybe because of that traumatic and imminent incident of losing her brother. Some incidents are so horrible and harsh that they can either ruin or transform our personalities completely or partially.

"You have changed, Miral." After an awkward silence, Zaid continued saying.

"I think so. The past couple of years were difficult and you learn a lot from your difficult days. I was alone there in Massachusetts. But in reality, I was spending time with myself, with the real Miral Fareed. I got to know, observe and explore my own personality. That was my learning time. Maybe, I have changed after my learning period. I have seen multiple colors of this world."

"Which color was the best?" Zaid said while their cappuccinos were served by the same waiter who noted their order.

"I couldn't choose any one color because every color holds their own mesmerizing story plot. Every color speaks in their own different way!"

"What do colors say?"

"Colors say that choose us, we have got our own aura. They say, we will heal you. They attract us and we get attracted towards these colors." Miral replied. Their coffees remained untouched.

"Were colors able to heal you?" Another question asked by that 'dark and tall' guy.

"Only a few of them were able to heal my soul. Some colors are so bright that we are unable to open our eyes when they are put in front of our eyes. We feel difficulty in opening our eyes. They are so bright that we might indulge ourselves in pain. That pain would be unforgettable because nobody expects pain from beautiful, mesmerizing things. But there are some colors which contain strange depth in their stories. They act like a cool, warm breeze that would protect and heal our souls from the burning heat of the world." Her face was emotionless but has got a depth in the words she spoke.

Zaid took a sip from his coffee and indicated towards Miral's coffee which was untouched and was ready to get cold under the light A.C of the cafe. "Miral, my cafe misses you. Do visit there." He spoke in a very low voice, seeing straight into her deep eyes.

"I will come. I have got a lot of beautiful, cherishing memories associated with your cafe." She smiled and replied back. How beautiful was her smile. Zaid felt like he saw this smile after a very long time. They both talked and

tried to avoid the indulging awkward silence in between. They have got a lot of things to plan, a lot of new strategies before implementing on them. Those two weren't strangers, but are you sure about that? How extreme is this word "Strangers"! This was clear that **'Miral Fareed's eyes were never an easy read for him.'**

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That night, it was a dark, empty and rough route. Nobody bothered to go there. While the road was fully captivated with negative tragedies and whispering noise of the wind and trees which were horribly terrifying one's soul. She was driving fast. More than her usual speed. She looked in hurry, she looked terrified and frightened too. Her face was sweating. The car was locked, the windows were closed and she stopped with a sudden break. Her big eyes were there staring on the road. But what was there on the road. She stopped the car and unintentionally she went out to look. She didn't want to go but she went. A body was lying, she was terrified but she didn't stop. She could see the blood. Red blood! The person lying on the road was fully covered

with thick blood. The face of the body was towards the opposite side of the road. Her face was still sweating. She tried to look at the body's face although she was terrified. The moment, she looked at that familiar face, her eyes opened and she screamed louder. A haunting dream. Horrifying! Her hands were shaking and her body was sweating. After returning back to Pakistan, Miral saw that haunting dream for the first time here. Before in Massachusetts, she almost used to see this haunting dream. She was terrified every time and then, decided to take sessions from a psychologist. She attended sessions and was trying hard to recover. But her massive overthinking was never letting her to get rid of that haunting dream.

She was still shaking. The doors in Awan house were sound proof, that's why no one could hear her scream and at midnight, everyone was sleeping. But how could Miral Fareed sleep peacefully? She looked up at the wall clock. It was 3:15 p.m. She took a filled glass of water from her bed's side table and drank the whole glass. It was sure that she

couldn't sleep now. She tried to calm herself and waited for the sun to rise and next morning to arrive. She wasn't getting far; she was sticked to that one crossroad! Sadly; Drastically! SHE FELT A BURDEN ON HER HEART. BURDEN LIKE HELL.

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The next morning arrived late. Miral was ready to go. She was wearing bottle green top with white flappers and white colored high heels. There were dark circles under her big eyes but she was looking beautiful. She reached Artistic holding where the first person she met was as usual Carl.

“Hey Miral Fareed.” Carl looked non-serious as always.

“Where is dad?” Miral looked serious in fact.

“He was having his flight today. He went to China to finalize his brand-new business deal.” A one second surprise in Miral’s eyes but then, she imminently became normal or at least tried to act normally in front of Carl.

“Didn’t he inform you?”

“Oh yes, of course he informed me. I almost forgot!” Miral smiled and tried to cover up.

“We can have a cup of tea!” Carl offered.

“Yeah sure! Coffee instead of tea.” Miral agreed for having coffee.

After a few minutes, they both were sitting in Carl’s room which looked descent having a big, prominent Nelson Mandela’s portrait. The whole room had a grey interior but that portrait grabbed everyone’s attention. Miral initiated the conversation gracefully. “Well, I need to know one thing about Ashar Fareed.”

“Oh! Miss Miral, you should firstly solve my financial problems and then, we may talk and you can get your favorable information about your own brother. Just deposit some money in my account!” Ugh! This nonserious attitude of this guy. Miral looked frustrated.

“Carl, I am serious, damn serious!” Miral clearly showed her frustration. She didn’t have much time to waste and that too with Carl. Never. Impossible. Carl came back to her serious mode. This man was really an actor. Miral had no chance, except to tolerate him.

“What do you want to know?”

“I want to know about all the enemies of Ashar Fareed.” Miral calmly said although there were lavas inside her heart.

“He was a government officer, a bureaucrat. He was having plenty of enemies around him. Some revealed themselves and some are still hidden. There is a long list, Miral.”

“What about the new partner of Artistic holding? Is he neutral?”

“Are you saying Talha Baig?”

“I don’t know why, but that man doesn’t give me good vibes. I always attain negativity from his sight. His presence and his partner shipping with my father doesn’t sound appropriate. I don’t know but my gut feeling says that something is still hidden about him! He looks mysterious!”

“Forget Talha Baig. He is only a business partner. Focus on only one person this time, who is the biggest enemy of Ashar Fareed.” Carl blasted through his words.

“Who are you talking about?”

“This is my bank account number.” He said in a lighter tone and handed over the piece of paper to Miral. After a while, Miral transferred some amount in Carl’s account because against every favor you would take from this man, he would definitely charge you and in return wants financial stability. That’s how he works. His financial security and his bank account filled up with his balance were the important aspects for him to work. And he would never miss the chance to take favors from Miral Fareed. The wanted amount was transferred in Carl’s account and now, he was ready to give another favor to Miral in return.

“Now, spit the name!” Miral said in an aggressive tone as if she was in a hurry to know about the biggest enemy of Ashar Fareed.

“Her name is **Nehal Rahim Khan**. You know corruption and these corrupt people. Hilariously, she became enemy of Ashar Fareed because he stood up against corruption and these corrupt mafias. He wanted to expose them and he was collecting evidences as well. He even succeeded in finding many evidences which could proof the corruption

of these mafias but unfortunately, he couldn't survive in this society. That Nehal Rahim is very dangerous, she owns a whole empire. She is the boss lady. She is very powerful and influential. Her father was a judge in high court and now he lives in America. Some people even says that she is involved in money laundering and in converting black money into white money." Carl spoke and Miral rewind a lot of things from the past. She was silently listening all the facts.

("How's your job going on Ashar?" Miral asked.

"Don't ask, it's giving me much tough time." Ashar answered.

"Corruption. That's the only issue."

"Oh! But I know my brother is not a corrupt person." Miral claimed that night.

"You are precious for me Miral, remember." The purity in his intentions.)

Miral rewind everything she knew. Who was this 'Nehal Rahim Khan'? The quest has got a new character to enter just in time. That too, an interesting one! Miral's deep eyes

were not an easy read for anyone as she was still looking at a certain point. She has got the ambiguity that this Nehal may have got any sort of association with Talha Baig. And she didn't know that her assumption was absolutely correct this time. She once heard from Ashar who was recalling the quote of Franz Kafka that; **'I have spent my life resisting the desire to end it.'** But would it be easy for her to resist, knowing the revealing truths. Ambiguity grew and hesitation rise up vastly. The grey room was suffocated or maybe Miral felt suffocation around her body. She stood and without saying 'goodbye' went out of the room. She was exhausted. Every day opens up to a new reality. New truths with anonymous secrets. How to handle them? How to still remain gentle, kind and strong. Why she felt that she was all alone in this journey! She was lonely because Fareed Awan was the one who closed the murder case of Ashar Fareed. Her own father wasn't there to support her. Miral Fareed's upcoming days would be tough, she clearly knew but would she stop? Guilt, repent, sorrows and what not! Miral felt every emotion that day. But her face

remained emotionless without any color. Colorless and emotionless with a heavy heart carrying stones inside.

There you go admiring the most beautified soul,
Faddish, heroic, adventurous and what not,
Hopes of heart destructed by the ego in between,
unless the surety of bonding was ensured.
the admirers kept on admiring those greenish eye balls,
all happened was from my side,
all difficulties endured was on my behalf,
turning ears to deaf people without cure to this faithful heart,
that waits for those days when you gonna put in an effort,
Remained a gel to my internal soul,
desperation kept on transitioning into hopelessness,
but the refusal to hope kept its dominance,
you keep on betraying yourself,
you kept on believing in hope,

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life even gets bore of those white flag efforts, but what goes on is this is 'heart's only will".

.....

It was an elongated but narrow street, covered with plants around, some of which were about to die due to excessive sunlight and lack of water or better call dehydration. It was a bright day. It seemed like this route carries the travelers to a massive farm house. Just at the moment, the roads and that narrow street witnessed four to five Havels moving towards that massive farm house in full speed as if they were in hurry. The cars entered and there you see an ordinary lady coming out from black Haval. Her looks weren't extraordinary but the attire she was wearing was branded, her shoes, the bag she was carrying and the iPhone she was holing in her hand, were all branded, expensive and attention grabbers. One of the person, her so called assistant came out quickly and guided her.

"Miss Nehal, Talha Baig is waiting for you." The guard in his uniform informed her.

Talha Baig was sitting in the massive lounge, smoking and waiting for the lady. Nehal entered and everyone else left the room. Only Nehal, her assistant and Talha were in the room.

“Long time no see.” Nehal started the conversation.

“The purpose was completed.”

“Not sure if it is.”

“Miral is back.”

“Do you think I care about her?”

“I know, you don’t care but you should.”

“The creativity of hypocrisy is in its cover game. It wasn’t corruption!”

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“What?”

“It wasn’t corruption!”

“Oh, the reason behind Ashar Fareed’s death?”

“Yes…”

“Then, what?”

“You know, how it feels to be rejected?” Her tone was emotional. “It is hurtful, it really is hurtful.” Nehal was at the peak of her emotions but her eyes were dry.

“It is not necessary to get back what you give but I am I ambiguity now.”
“You are aware about half truth. It’s time to reveal another truth.”
“What is going on in your mind? We are work partners; you should tell me.”

“Ashar Fareed was murdered because we became strangers that day. Rejection is always hard to accept. I was born to listen yes from everyone but he rejected me. Am I ordinary? He crushed my soul, my emotions and my self-respect. I had no other option. He died because he couldn’t love me back.”
“Oh! I thought it was corruption and those cases in the court…”
“These were secondary reasons. He was against my father ‘Rahim Khan’ and that wasn’t a problem but then, he stood against me and my feelings as well. How can I bare that? The only option left was…” She was looking dangerously serious. All of a sudden, she wasn't able to cover up more

so tried to change the topic. "Let's leave this for another day! It'll be better for now."

"Okay, I am keeping an eye on Miral."

"She looks sharp, be careful. Trace her every single step. She could be troublesome for our next plan."

"Don't worry. I have trapped Fareed Awan. I have to leave for Artistic Holding's meeting for a new project. You know, new partner of Artistic Holding."

Talha Baig left the room and Nehal Fareed wiped off her fake tears. She was a good pretender. A good con game played by her in front of this stupid guy, Talha Baig. She was evil smart and you'll soon know this. She was classmate of Ashar Fareed, then her college and university fellow as well. But what goes out of the way? Where did things go unwell? It was probably because of that one person, Nehal's father, Rahim Khan. Eviler than her but his daughter was out of script who holds a story which was not understandable for any ordinary person. Her new con game was about to work in her favor as it was initiated. Quotidian, unremarkable!

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"Miral, how could you reopen the case file of Ashar Fareed?" Fareed Awan looked in a bad mood.

Comparatively, Miral looked calm. She was sitting on the lounge's sofa, her emotionless eyes on the floor and she, herself was pretending to be in peace. She was a good actor, maybe a pretender.

"How do you know?"

"Miral, you are still asking me how I got to know about this all. Listen to me carefully, in this city, the lawyer you contacted and all other lawyers, stakeholders, businessmen and all high-profile people are in my contact list. Each step that you took was under my eye. In the end, you won't reopen this case."

Miral looked up at his face, stood up and calmly said, "Why are you stopping me? Do you think you can stop me? Even, if all the lawyers of this city, this country or of this whole world are in your contact list, I just don't care about it. I only need one thing and that's justice. I want justice for Ashar Fareed. If you can't support me, then don't come in

my way. Don't try to demotivate or stop me because you can't stop me now. You should have done this and fought my brother's case. He was your son and he was murdered brutally. You feel like you are powerful but you don't have enough courage to find and take revenge from the culprits. You can't do that!" The last sentence was spoken harshly by her.

"This wouldn't work for you, I knew that. No one will take your case. The files will be closed and you will see what I can do!"

The lounge was filled up with a suffocated atmosphere. There was quietness held in between. How suffocating this quietness can be? Drastically life taking, quietness!

Miral couldn't do anything but could only see the man sitting in front of her who was her so-called father, Fareed Awan. Sometimes this world seems to be drastically a restless place where your own loved ones can stand in front of you, in your way, creating hurdles, creating problems, creating difficulties for you although you are on the right

pathway. They know that you are on the right path but still they stop you.

After a while, when she spoke so her tone was lighter than before. She spoke in a soft tone, "Why are you like this? Who are Ashar Fareed and Miral Fareed for you?" A tear felt from her eye. She tried harder to not let that tear fell off from her eye. She doesn't want to cry in front of anyone, even not in front of her father. “Why are you dictating me once again? When my brother died, you told me to bury my voice with Ashar’s body, when I tried to bury my voice, I failed and then you dictated me to go out from Pakistan. I went abroad for the sake of my menta peace. You always dictated our family. Firstly, mom, then Ashar and now, it’s my turn. Don’t you know, how hurtful it’s to be part of a broken family? Isn’t my brother valued? Shouldn’t he deserve to get justice? Is there any voice of Miral Fareed?” Fareed Awan looked at her, “Your justice won’t bring him back. It’s my last warning; the case file will not be reopened at any cost.”

“Pretty fine! The case file will not be reopened, the case will not go to the courts and the lawyers wouldn’t attain that justice from the courts and judges but still…” She paused for a moment and then, continued, “This time, my voice will not be buried anymore.”

The voice will not be buried anymore. Not this time!

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Her phone was ringing. Only a table lamp was on, otherwise there was darkness on the other side of the room. Karl was continuously calling her as she was invited in an official dinner of Artistic Holding. She was in the balcony and then, she came inside the room and closed the balcony's door. The cold breeze was also stopped that was coming inside the room through the balcony. She took her pen and diary, turned the room lights on. The whole room was lightened but what about life? Was it also lightened? It has to take time. A lot more time to venture. A lot more dreams to be fulfilled or maybe to remain incomplete. Hopelessness was never an option. Optimism is always the

right case to hold on with. Never be fooled by being on the blind spot.

Under the lights, she opened her diary and started writing. What else can a pen girl do? When does this inner writer flourish? Of course, in our broken days. Those days where a person feels broken, divided and soulless. There's a writer hidden in every person and the right time, stretches out that inner, hidden, fearless writer. The pen girl was ready to write with her standardized words coming from her heart directly.

"The afternoon was dull; every color of this world was now dull for me. My whole world belongs to that one person, to that one guy who meant to be my family but the whole world is stopping me. But why? They are making me hopeless in this case! I feel like I'm alone in this chaotic world, there's chaos filled around me. How to get out of this all? It's suffocating, it's exhausting! It really is. I'm losing hope. They all are compelling me to get discouraged. Hilariously, I'm becoming a coward. But should I be like that? No, I shouldn't! I have plenty of plans. What if my

plan A has failed, I will work on my plan B and if it fails too, then, I have got multiple more." She paused for a minute as if she was contemplating, thinking deeply about something, trying to maintain focus. The pen girl again restarted writing on a new page of her diary with a smooth gel pen.

"I read somewhere that; I wish I was a medieval writer in an old stone library, writing letters with a quill by candlelight while a storm rages outside. I would admire that stormy evening, sitting inside that old stone library, with a cup of coffee, silently hitting those nostalgic moments. I can even admire it my whole life silently. That would be the best job for me. No wonders! But I always feel connected to this inner pen girl in me. Ashar and I used to visit libraries in England every weekend. We used to read and borrow books of our own interests. I used to live in my fantasy world, admiring princess tales of love which were full of colors and happy endings. But Ashar was more interested in history and politics which had no colors, only tragic endings and fearful deaths. I used to criticize him for

reading such boring books which were exhausting for me because I believe that reality already exhausts. He never replied to my judgement. Maybe, my judgement was true. But his death gave every reply to me. That tragic end of Ashar Fareed was enough to reply to my judgements. It was enough. It reminded me that reality actually exhausts. It breaks you for a moment and then, it holds you back because this life never stops. Everything goes on in its flow. It's important to get rid of those toxic people who'll pretend to be your healers but it's you who's going to heal you. I don't want closure. I want my words to be heard everywhere, to bounce up and down, creating echoes. I want the poetic echoes of this unfinished story.

Dear diary, you must be wondering why I'm being a storyteller, out of nowhere. STRANGE! You'll soon admire my words too, even the whole world and if not the whole world, then Ashar's enemies would admire and repent over it because the inner writer in me has woken up and it will neither stop nor sleep. Anymore. It will be the story of Miral Fareed."

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It was a sunny morning, filled up with a light breeze in the air. The sun was up and the day started with new levels of energy. The pen girl was sitting in the open-air, wooden restaurant. She was wearing a long navy-blue colored shirt with jeans and pink silk staller. Her coffee was getting cold but she was focused on her laptop's screen. Just then, the man with light brownish eyes arrived.

"Good morning." Zaid greeted her with a warm phrase.

"Morning!" Cold reply from her side.

"You don't visit my cafe now. Can I ask the reason?"

"You are asking as if you feel guilty about it." Miral looked up at his face, closing her laptop as she couldn't maintain her focus now. In the presence of this man, how could she maintain her focus? Impossibly difficult.

"Why will I feel guilty?" He looked straight into her eyes. Why do these men always have the courage to look directly into their eyes? Like they have got the capacity to read the eyes and analyze everything of what's going inside of me.

"Well, there's no specific reason."

"What about your case reopening plan?" He changed the topic.

"It has failed."

"Failed?"

"Probably, this is what I have said." She emphasized upon her words.

"What is next now?" He looked curious.

"I have got a plan B."

"Was Fareed Awan responsible for this failure?"

"Don't drag him in between." She was frustrated.

"Calm down. Acceptance is important for you to proceed ahead otherwise you would fail at every step."

"Well, people think that only by reaching the courts, we could attain justice. This is the wrong mindset."

"What are you thinking about?" He was still curious.

"You'll see. I need to reach somewhere." She packed her laptop stuff and stood up as if she was in a hurry mood to reach somewhere. She was good at escaping from the situations, she never wanted to face or answer. She always

used to escape. That was her old habit and it's difficult to erase a habit from person's mind.

"Sure." **Her eyes were surely not an easy read for Zaid Jahangir**. The tall and handsome acknowledged.

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This was another afternoon. She was waiting in her car. The AC was on but still it was a scorching hot day today. The day was tremendously long and burdensome. Nehal was seeing something on her phone when it rang with a silent ringtone. Talha Baig was calling and she knew that this call was to update something to her.

"I told you not to call me on my private number." Her tone confirmed that she was not in a good mood.

"Don't worry, it's not being recorded."

"I don't care about the recording but you need to hesitate as long as you are in Artistic holding. What's the update?"

"Miral is not going to file the case."

"I already know about it. What's new?"

"But you can never stop her!"

"What's she planning now?"

"Madam Nehal, she's not only planning but has also started executing her plans."

"What do you mean?" Nehal was perplexed.

"She's writing a book." He paused for a second. "A book on the life of Ashar Fareed."

"Interesting. She will mention the names of all his enemies and corrupt people as well who were against him, right?"

"Obviously, she will."

"Interesting. But will she mention Ashar's corruption as well?" She was superbly fascinated by the situation.

“Interestingly, not. She will never do this. Because she lives in an allusion that his pious brother’s character is crystal clear and clean.”

“Do you know something?” He suspected from the lady wearing red, dark lipstick in the car.

“Probably…. I am good at story making and I guess you are a good story teller.”

Nehal Rahim Khan was ready for constructing a brand new story for the audience.

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She was in her white night gown, holding a pen and a diary under the lamp light. Her eyes were shining brightly as if she was holding an aim, an exciting mission and her heart blooming up with hope. “Dear diary, they say my brother, Ashar is a corrupt man, he had been indulged into a lot of scandals now. I know these are all false rumors. Rumors are always a lie. I don’t believe what media says, what people say. Dad said that, leave everything and return back to USA. But how can I? I am almost at the edge of completing my book. You know what, I received a call as well regarding the collaboration offer for my book. How exciting that before the actual publication of my book, people are invested into it. They want to dig the truth, so do I. I met a lady as well, oh what’s her name? I can’t remember… oh yes, Nehal Rahim Khan, I met her as she wanted to express her feelings about my upcoming book. A strange meeting though. It was only an ice-breaking meeting, that’s it. She has invited me to tell something confidential about Ashar Fareed. I am curious to know about, what she knows about my brother.”

As Miral wrote her emotions in the form of words and be expressive for a moment, let us all dive back to the day when Miral met the lady in red lipstick in the Frere Hall. She was wearing a red skirt with black top shirt, red lipstick, wearing black block heels and was eagerly waiting for someone but pretending to roam and look around the exhibition going on there. She was good at pretending. She knows that Miral Fareed will for sure arrive here and here you go, Miral Fareed was here already. Miral was in a white long attire with high heels and sun glasses on her hairs. She was looking elegant as always. Nehal Rahim Khan looked at her and then went for her first meeting with the elegant girl standing in front of her and was taking pictures of the exhibition. She was with her friend but she would have gone somewhere to look around. This was the best time to meet her as Miral was alone.

"Excuse me, are you Miral Fareed?" Nehal pretended as if she was confirming although she knew who Miral was.

"Yes." One word answer from the side of Miral for strangers, as expected. Miral looked perplexed as she

didn't know about the person she was meeting for the first time and that too, an unexpected meet up.

"Oh, I must say, you are so pretty in real as well." Nehal tried to continue her talk. "I really want to meet you in person and look my wish was fulfilled. How lucky I'm? I heard about your book and I'm eager to read it after it gets published."

Miral's perplexity grew even more. (Why was she complementing her? She was a stranger to Miral. Miral didn't know her but of course, she knew Miral very deeply.)

"Sorry, but I didn't recognize you. Do I know you?" The question was much expected as she better had the idea about the reserved personality of Miral Fareed.

"I am Ashar Fareed's closest friend." Nehal didn't want to drag the drama more, so came to the point straight away.

"Can we meet some day in peace? Like somewhere, where we can sit, only I and you, and calmly talk."

The word 'closest friend' from her mouth was really unexpected for Miral. She didn't know much about her and all other friends and the social circle of Ashar Fareed but

still the lady standing in front was strange and full of complexity. If she was Ashar's closest friend, then she would know about it.

"Why will I meet you? You are stranger! I don't know you. You were Ashar Fareed's closest friend, right? Not mine!"

How straight forward and direct Miral Fareed was.

Absolutely, she was!

"Because I have important details to share with you about Ashar Fareed." Miral was in shock. What important details? What kind of hidden mysteries were cooking? Why can't she talk here? Who is she?

Miral wanted to refuse her but couldn't as she was in deep curiosity now. They exchanged the number. At first glimpse, the lady looked strange to Miral but then, she was normal and thought that maybe, her details would be helpful for gathering much information about her book.

Miral never heard the name 'Nehal Rahim Khan' before, even not from Ashar Fareed. She was glad that her book was gaining publicity even before being published. Miral never knew that her first meeting with Nehal Rahim Khan

was much simpler but was about to bring complexity with a lot of revealing truths and secrets coming straight from heart.

The strange meeting dived back to the night when Miral was busy mentioning her thoughts into the pages made from those wooden trees. Sometimes you meet unexpected individuals in your life that know you more than you know about yourself. Aware people! Strange ones! How often you find someone who reveals their hidden mysteries in front of you? How often? Not every time, the heart acknowledged.

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She was there sitting calmly in the café and waiting for him to arrive. She was wearing pink colored long shirt with white trousers and flat slippers for today. He called Miral and wanted to meet her as soon as possible. Miral agreed and decided to meet him today. Nehal Rahim Khan had rescheduled her meeting with Miral and now their plan has switched to tomorrow. She was relaxed, enjoying the

nature and atmosphere of the beautiful café. Everything looked perfect about the day. But Miral didn't know that something unpredictable and unexpected would turn up tings for her, for which she was never ready. Miral Fareed was curious that why Zaid Jahangir wants to meet her urgently. Oh, Miral Fareed and her never-ending curiosity.

Here, he came, wearing black t-shirt with black colored pants as always. Black was his favorite go to color.

Absolutely, it was her favorite color too. Zaid's favorite color and his favorite girl were obviously perfect choices for him. He knew that Miral Fareed was there in his life somewhere to complete him. He once rejected her because she was daughter of Fareed Awa but now....

What was up to happen now? Aren't sudden decisions harmful? Not every time! Not always!

Miral looked at him, eyes locked and then she looked away as he came near, greeted her and settled down in front of her.

(Why is he staring at me?) Miral thoughts were deep but she knew that he eyes were not an easy read, especially for

Zaid Jahangir. “Is everything alright?” Miral started the conversation.

“Yes, I wanted to talk about something…. something important.” Zaid Jahangir was never so conscious about what he was saying but this time he was attentive.

“What important?”

“We can firstly order something.” Then, he signaled the waitress and order two cappuccinos.

“Zaid, what do you want to say? I am curious now.” Miral couldn’t wait more.

“We should be together.” The words were spilled so fast, with higher pace that she looked strangely at his face. Her mouth zipped, her hairs straight and her eyes, of course, not an easy read for Zaid Jahangir. Zaid was looking straight into her eyes and she… Miral Fareed looked away at an uncertain point. This was unexpected. Unpredictable. How can it be? Speechless! Was it a dream? A dream? This restaurant owner, the tall guy. Zaid Jahangir, with light brownish eyes. Once Miral Fareed commented about him

that, **“Don’t know much, but my vibes say that he is a self- made person.”**

He is different! Her brain reminded her again.

Once Zaid Jahangir told her, **“I am good at reading eyes! And your deep eyes are bad at hiding emotions.”** Was he reading Miral’s eyes even today as well? Her emotions were incorporated in her eyes, she knew that. **“Miss Miral, I am good at reading people.”**

They met in the café. They met in the party, she came to know that he was the new café owner, she was having coffee with him in the mall, they were talking, he was giving his free suggestion and she always used to run away, she never learned to calm herself in front of him. Miral come out of your thoughts! Her heart whispered to her brain. Move up, say something! React on this sudden confession!

“What do you mean? Together? Are you serious?” Miral tried to react normal but how to give a normal and peaceful reaction when her heart was pumping so faster.

“Am I not looking serious? Miral, we have already wasted our time because of our pointless ego. I think, what you feel and what I feel are same. We have compatibility, we understand each other, I don’t know about you but I understand more than anyone else in the world.” He stopped and looked here and there, then continued. “I know it’s late, maybe sudden but I want to fix everything for you. And moreover, we are not strangers anymore!” The last line was said in a joyful mood because he knew that Miral Fareed always indulge that ‘stranger’ point in between.

Miral Fareed was astonished but she wasn’t angry. Why will she be angry? She was quiet, a bit silent, she wanted to speak and ask a lot of things from this person sitting in front of her but she couldn’t utter a single word. Their coffees were served by the waitress.

“You can take your time, think about it and then, you can answer me but please, Miral this time, don’t ignore your emotions because of your ego! Think from you heart.”

“You think, I am egoistic! And I think from my mind.” She spoke and could only speak this at the moment. Miral Fareed was egoistic! How rude! How direct! “Don’t you remember, you once said, Miral, you are brilliant but you and I can never become us.” You said that we are just friends. I was just a random person for you. Then, what’s the change now?”

“Miral that was past! I wasn’t ready for anything that time but now, I changed my mind and I think, you are the only one I want in my life and I look up to.” Miral missed a heartbeat, butterflies in stomach, heart beats faster than before.

“You were having problem that I am daughter of Fareed Awan, I am still his daughter!” Miral Fareed was only resolving her doubts, confronting him, indulging his own sayings as she remembered that all. How can she not forget this all? Remembrance is a curse. It is indeed!

“Miral, I don’t care about these things!”

“Why not now? You cared about these things back when I confessed to you.”

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“Again, you are making things difficult for us just because I hurt your ego.”

“No… you didn’t hurt my ego, you hurt my feelings.”

“I am sorry for that! That time as well, I was sorry. Now, I am saying, I will fix everything for you.”

“Is your sorry enough? Do you think, it is enough?” She doesn’t want her tone to be high but she was a bit sacred, a bit worries and upset about what happened in between them in the past.

“Miral, I will fix everything. I can fix everything for you. I just need your support. I just need your companionship. Can you?”

(What he just said? Fixing everything for me?) She was being too emotional but she wasn’t able to answer right now. “I think you are not okay, Mr. Zaid Jahangir!”

“You know it well that what kind of feelings I had for you. I wasn’t expressive but I guess now, things should go smooth and direct. I was compelled due to some reasons.”

“How can I trust you?”

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“You should, because you always knew that what I have I my heart for you. Girls always have idea that what other guy is thinking about them!”

“I don’t know about your feelings. I am bad with these things now! You know, I am here just for a thin to accomplish. My dad is still opposing me because he doesn’t care about justice for Ashar Fareed. He had never cared about his family. He just have things to sort out for money, for Artistic holding. I have a lot to do alone in this journey and…”

“Why alone? I can be with you.”

“You will be in danger, Zaid. I lost Ashar Fareed. I don’t want my loved ones to be in danger.” The last sentence was said in a fluent manner without realizing that what she had said. But Zaid realized, noticed and smiled.

“Your loved ones?” For a second, Miral realized and looked down at the table, at her untouched coffee which was still warm. “Are you confessing?” Zaid was still smiling. She was blushing on her own sentence. (Why did I say this? Oh! Shit! I shouldn’t say this. Miral, you are such a fool.)

Zaid noticed her perplexity and then, changed the topic himself. “Don’t worry about me. When I’ll be with you, no one can hurt us.”

Did he say ‘us’? Why this dream is not ending? Wake up, Miral. Come on! Run from here. She really wanted to escape but her feet were not able to move now. “I need time.” She could only say this, stood up and signaled that this meeting is over now.

“Your coffee?” Zaid reminded her about her untouched coffee.

“No more cravings.” She was going without saying a goodbye or better say, she was escaping when Zaid called her name and she missed a beat of her heart. This never happened before wit Miral Fareed. Her name could be so special, she never knew about it. Miral turned back, looked into his eyes and waited for him to say something when Zaid Jahangir tried to gain the trust of Miral Fareed by saying what she wanted to hear from him.

“Miral, I will be waiting for your answer and you should know, that this time, my feelings are genuine.”

Zaid Jahangir never had any idea that he had already gained Miral Fareed's trust. Miral Fareed escaped once again. She always used to do this!

That evening grew deeper into the dark night but with the bright moonlight, covered with tight and wild winds, never telling that what was going to happen ahead? What's next now? Even, the sky didn't have any idea! The moon looked at the humans who were busy in admiring it. How beautiful everything was! Superbly gorgeous. Miral Fareed and Zaid Jahangir were not strangers, the moon acknowledged that night.

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It never feels the same way as if you were,
It feels like a tchotchke, an inexpensive, small, less precious ornament.
Some wrong-doings would have altered you,
Transformed the way you express, feel, think and accept.
How to not accept that you were part of something,

Something important or unusual certainly,
You never know, how could you?
Unaware truths are a blessing to be counted.
With patience, encountering in the most resilient manner.
You were here to conquer,
Then why lost now?
You were distracted, understandable!
Why not to resume again?
Why not roaming on the field, on the streets again?
Afraid of hurting your shoeless toes, your naked feet?
To roam was to find your destination,
Not the final one but the initial one absolutely.
The destiny must be playful with you and your compulsions!
But I know, you won't settle for less,
You don't require bundle of roses with sympathies.

I already told you, I know you better.
You changed, you transformed, and you altered.
I saw different shades, several versions of you strangely,
From distance, retrenching, reducing and tightening.
You better cherish yourself, clap in darkness for yourself,
You need to appreciate the timings for everything to be done.
Don't ever try to do everything at once!
It takes time, step by step, do each single thing every day.
Those unsaid words must have said one day,
Even if it touches the deepest of one's soul.
Passing side by side with eyes grounded like strangers.
What a limelight moment to remember!
Knowing only the names and nothing else.
What else is required now?

Still expecting the transformation for the sake of what!

Always meant to be unknown, unsung like it was written already.

Hope never dies, it is still alive, breathing lively.

How unapologetically true!

That you were changed taking all inside you.

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She was in her deep grief, the grief of being rejected from that one person she had tried hard to get or more often to win like if he was a trophy. Nehal Rahim Khan was sitting in her room in her night dress, her face without makeup, she was woebegone at the moment. How couldn't she? The grief and sorrow was deep. She postponed her meeting with Miral Fareed. She couldn't gather that courage to meet her but one day, she has to meet her and confess everything. Every single truth.

"Nehal, I never had idea that you were having feelings for me. But sadly, I am not into this! I can't be with someone. My job doesn't allow me to

do so. I have responsibilities to fulfill. Even, my life would never give me a second chance!"

The rejection from Ashar Fareed Awan wasn't acceptable for her. She couldn't resist. She couldn't stay silent. Rejection! It was like a knife stabbed in her heart. Her heart was bleeding. She was harmed. She hurt herself after listening these words. She tried to crash her car but life gave her second chance. She wanted to convince Ashar Fareed once again. She had always got whatever she wanted or desired for. But this time, her fate wasn't accepting what she truly wanted this time. This time, emotions were involved. Feelings stood in between but she had to do what she never thought she would do. She begged in front of Ashar Fareed for the sake of love. She wasn't in her senses.

"I think you are not in your senses, you are mad! I am not a trophy that you would win and have holds on it forever. I am a human and you can't compel me to feel what you feel."

Once Ashar Fareed said to her when she was stalking him. He was frustrated. He had politely given his answer but Nehal was not able to accept any sort of rejection.

“Ashar please try to understand, I can’t live without you!”

“Don’t make me your obsession. No one dies here for anyone.”

“But I would die.” Nehal was crying. But Ashar Fareed was heartless for her.

She knew that the whole city and especially the girls from their society were behind Ashar Fareed. They idealized his dashing personality. But here was Ashar Fareed who never wanted to seek anyone’s attention or never cared about anyone except for his family, for Miral Fareed especially! She was his sister, very close to his heart. Very special for him.

“Then, go and die. It’s your choice!” And these words... she could never forget. Wow! Nehal Rahim Khan was still alive but Ashar Fareed died. He died after one

year. After that day, when he totally showed up that he doesn't care about Nehal Rahim Khan. This was the day when Nehal Rahim also turned up into a heartless person. She let go all her feelings. She never forgot Ashar Fareed but she didn't cry again for him or begged in front of him. Nehal was also having strong position in society. Many of the people were behind her, for initiating a relationship with her but she only wanted that one guy... Ashar Fareed and Ashar Fareed never wanted anything. Not even, Nehal Rahim Khan. Her parents died when she was only twenty years old in a car crash in London. She was living with her grandfather in Pakistan but after few years, he also dies and now, she was all alone but with all property of her father and grandfather. She handled all the business of her father and grandfather and never felt alone. She was used to of being alone because her parents were living in London and she was living in Pakistan since childhood with her grandfather who was mostly busy in his business empire. She stayed in Pakistan for Ashar Fareed. She started caring about him. She was her class fellow in

college. Then, she chose the same university as well. Their departments were also same. Ashar Fareed only perceived her as a random girl, or more commonly as a class mate. Nothing more than that but for the first time, Nehal had the wish of being established with Ashar Fareed. But not all wishes are fulfilled. Most of the desires are incomplete as well. Unfinished, ruthless desires. She never heard of 'no' for anything, she had always won at every stage, got what she desired for but this time, she lost Ashar Fareed and Ashar Fareed lost his life.

She cried that night when Ashar Fareed's soul departed, that was the last night when she cried for him in that dark room, having no light but only the voice of her silent tears which fell the whole night till the sun rise again. That was a ghosted night, a frightening one!

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Zaid Jahangir was unable to find a way to demolish his own precious emotions, those emotions which were only for that one beautiful, elegant and confident girl... Miral

Fareed. Daughter of Fareed Awan. But who cares now? Who gave importance to this fact now? The day he saw Miral Fareed in that café, that was a turn-up, a turning point. Everything changed that moment for Zaid Jahangir. He wanted to control everything, interestingly his emotions too that were bending towards Miral Fareed but can you ever try holding your emotions like a heartless person? Not an easy task to manage your emotions! Miral Fareed was special in his eyes. When someone feel special to, you would never want them to go from your lives, to go far away from you or you never want to leave them. Zaid Jahangir was never ready to accept his emotions and was always in denial phase. Even, never showed his care for Miral Fareed. It wasn't easy for him to let Miral go abroad after the death of Ashar Fareed. He met Ashar Fareed only two times in his life but Miral thought that they both were deep friends. He never denied because she saw them talking to each other in that party which was organized in Awan House. Ashar also introduced him as his friend and she thought that they were very close. She never knew that

this wasn't the case, friendship between boys is very simple and only a result of two meetings.

Ashar Fareed was different, he wasn't like his father, Fareed Awan. He was the one who sacrificed his life for truth. He knew that Miral was broken, she vanished somewhere, her heart, her feelings and emotions all vanished with Ashar Fareed in that grave that night. He wanted to support her, encourage her and calm her down. He wanted to see Miral Fareed in peace. The fire inside her should freeze up as it would only hurt her. Zaid already hurt the feelings of Miral multiple times but this time, after Miral's return from abroad, he wasn't able to stay away from her as he wanted to protect Miral Fareed from all dangers. He even tried to change his personality and was able to showcase some sort of patience towards Miral's attitude and her mood swings. This is what you do, when you are in love! Even, when you love a stranger, this is what you be. Zaid Jahangir and Miral Fareed were two souls with stranger mindset and fragile egos.

That night was a long one as both strangers were in thoughts of each other, thinking about each other, about their first meeting in the café that one day, about the confessions they made and about their future together with a lot of hope, aspirations and dreams to fulfill together ahead. Those eyes were sleepless but hopeful. Their feelings were special. As fate never wanted them to end up as strangers! Destiny has got some new plans with a wink of hope and positive spark.

Miral Fareed on the bed of her room and Zaid Jahangir on the bench of a park were relaxed and satisfied with their decisions of heart. For sure, Miral's answer was her desire and Zaid's acceptance was his accomplishment. Both strangers stood up and looked up at the sky with wondering eyes. The next morning was about to bring new ray of hope for them. Absolutely! Moonlight smiled at both strangers.

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A spectral of that moment reminded, when she entered Awan House, those throwback moments when she gave those orders. Those orders which could be given by only a heartless person.

Miral was sitting in that beautiful lounge and was waiting for her. That meeting with Nehal Rahim Khan was decided to be held in Awan house.

Where, Nehal was outside the door and was in her deep thoughts that had surrounded her every time, whenever she decided to meet Miral Fareed. Redemption, guilt, regret were burdening her soul. Not more now! Enough! She did no wrong then, this guilt! Why was this regret breaking her into pieces and still, she showed to the world, how cruel and heartless she was! She was cruel and heartless, indeed. She had decided everything. Everything was finalized.

Nehal finally entered the lounge. Miral was in her own thoughts looking at the poolside which was visible from the large sized windows of that lounge. She realized that someone came, she turned back and tried to smile but the

lady in red lipstick (as usual) was too serious, with no smile. She looked totally different from the lady, she met at exhibition in Frere Hall that day.

"I am Ashar Fareed's closest friend. I have important details to share with you about Ashar Fareed." Something had changed, totally changed. Maybe her expressions or Miral's vibes maybe. She couldn't think of anything positive. She signaled towards the sofa that sit let's talk.

"Have a seat, please." Miral said in a confident manner.

"I wasn't expecting that you would call me here at Awan House for this meeting." Nehal came back with her confident and arrogant voice. She made all those ghosted, spectral to go in vain for a while or maybe forever, they went in vain. Nothing can haunt her now. She was calm and relaxed. No redemption at all on her face. She was a good actor for sure. Pretender!

"You wanted to meet me. Meeting me was your choice and the venue of meeting should be of my choice." She smiled. Miral's smile was cold. The smile she gave to strangers.

Nehal Rahim Khan could be closest friend of her brother but for her, she was a stranger. An unknown.

“Ahh! Smart like Ashar Fareed.”

“How do you know my brother?” A direct question from Miral Fareed.

“I even know your dad, Mr. Fareed Awan!”

“Well, right now, I am talking about Ashar Fareed.” Miral emphasized upon the name ‘Ashar Fareed’. “How do you know my brother?” The question was repeated again.

“We were together in college, then in university.” Nehal made her voice low.

“He never told me about you.”

“How could he?”

“Sorry?”

“Understandable.”

“I am unable to understand. Can you make it direct and simple for me? So that we can’t waste each other’s time!” Miral was direct of course as always.

“I used to like him.” First confession of the day by Nehal Rahim Khan.

“A lot of girls used to like him because of his charismatic personality.”

“I liked him because he was extraordinary.”

“Well, you came here to give me this detail. Thank you so much Miss Nehal but you wasted my time.”

“Do you know, what is rejection?”

“Sorry?”

“The feeling of being rejected…” Nehal looked towards the windows and the poolside. “Ashar Fareed rejected me. He took my feelings like they were fake, ordinary and as if I was a random girl in his life.”

“Why are you telling me about this?”

“He was wrong at his place. He did wrong. I wasn’t ordinary. My feelings for him were never fake or ordinary.”

“But Ashar never promised you for anything.”

“I had to take the revenge!” She bluntly stand, stood up from that sofa, her voice and tone high! Second confession of that day.

“Revenge…?” Miral couldn’t stand from her place.

“From Ashar Fareed. Revenge of that rejection. It took only one year to decide everything!” She was not Nehal Rahim Kahn, she was someone else.

“Did you…?” Miral couldn’t speak. But Nehal was speaking, non-stop.

“I decided everything! And that night…”

“Did you kill him?” Miral’s voice was very low as if she was whispering to herself.

“I had to do this.” Nehal’s cold reply. And everything was confessed today. When she get out from that lounge, from Awan House, Miral didn’t see, she couldn’t see anything now. She felt like she was blind, deaf and dumb.

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She was sitting in her room, dark room, lights turned off. Eyes without tears, without any fear. She was not feeling anything. She got to know about the whole hidden story, the whole confession from Nehal Rahim Khan. Heartless story! She went through a lot of pain. She suffered a lot! She returned to Pakistan with a purpose, the desire was to

obtain justice for Ashar Fareed who was murdered that night. The victim was gone, departed from this world to never come back, to never return back. But here was Nehal Rahim Khan playing the victim card. She was the actual predator! A cruel one. She destroyed everything. She took Ashar Fareed's life. She took everything from her, her family, her brother! She did wrong, totally wrong. It wasn't only wrong, it was a sin. To destroy one's family is only a mistake? Or a sin? A biggest sin, probably. And Nehal Rahim Khan was the sinner. The destroyer. The predator. Distorted feelings. She wasn't having more energy to resist or to show more tolerance or resilience from her side. She was tired now. No words to explain, what she was going through. After all, she was going through hell. It was all done, finished. End of the story. The final climax of her book. The final chapter of Ashar Fareed's story. It wasn't expected but it's always the unexpected things that take up your way. It's never too obvious for everyone in this life. Colors of this world dimmed for a moment and then, blackness over-cast the whiteness of everything. In the end,

those colors' shimmer vanished and all was turned evil at last. But at the cost of what? At the cost of Ashar Fareed's life! His beloved brother's life was sacrificed behind the cruelty and selfish desires of this world. Selfish desires of Nehal Rahim Khan. This wasn't her love for Ashar Fareed, this was her blind obsession that put fire across. Love isn't about winning every time, it's also about to sacrifice something, to let go your most favorite desire. Selfishness couldn't be another name for love.

She stood up from her place, the room was still dark and without any sort of glimpse of light or bulb. Even the moonlight couldn't enter the room as all the windows, balcony door and the main door were closed, closed like the lock couldn't be open now. Like everything was locked for a while to never reopen, even not for a second! It was difficult to open because the key was lost like Miral Fareed lost Ashar Fareed. What a big loss!

She opened the door, the huge corridor's light made her look at the way to her Dad's room. Does he know everything? Was Fareed Awan aware about the actual

truth? Who killed his one and only son? Was he going to be shocked? Was this hurtful for him as well? A lot of questions but no one to answer. Miral Fareed walked through the corridor with a lot of memories and throwbacks hitting her harder.

"Ashar, I'm telling you, don't paint these walls. Dad will be angry!" Little Miral warned her big brother.

"Don't worry, my princess! Of course, Miral is going to save me from dad's anger!" Miral astonishingly looked into his eyes.

"Why will I save you?" She wasn't ready to get scolded by her dad because of Ashar.

"You won't save me? You won't save your beloved brother?" Ashar tried to make her emotional.

And here she was alone in this world, standing on the cold floor; she couldn't save him. She couldn't save her beloved brother. Memories always hurt. Another flashback hit her suddenly.

"Aren't I looking handsome?" Ashar Fareed asked her. They were going out somewhere for a family dinner. Their mother was also with them. A complete, happy, perfect family.

"But I am looking more beautiful, look at my ring, it's so pretty!!" Miral pointed towards her ring finger.

"Yes, of course, because you are my princess!" Ashar never forgot to applaud his little sister.

“There’s one more reason!” He said as if he remembered something important.

“What reason?”

“You are beautiful because you are sister of your handsome brother, means me, Ashar Fareed.” he pointed towards himself and she laughed and kept on laughing.

“Why are you laughing now?”

“Look everyone, my brother is quite self-obsessed!” She said loudly as if she was providing news updates to the whole house.

“Proud to be!” Both of them smiled and Miral was surely proud of her brother.

Even, today she was proud of her late brother. Beautiful memories coming back with a lot of pain. Her chest was in pain but not a single tear dropped from her eyelids. She entered Fareed Awan's study room, silently. He was sitting behind the table, reading a file. Then, he looked up at his daughter's face which was completely white. Blank, expressionless, emotionless! No feelings, no choice of words, no diction.

"Miral, you didn't come for dinner. Are you alright?"

"You knew about it! Right?"

Silence for a minute.

"What are you saying, Miral?"

"I'm sure, you were aware about all of this mess!"

"You aren't looking alright! Go take some rest."

"You withdrew Ashar's murder case because Nehal's company was giving a huge amount of shares to you. Again your benefit interfered in between. Yet, once again."

"Miral, stop it!" The disappeared tears started falling down from her eyes.

"You destroyed our family, Baba!" After how many days, did Miral call him baba instead of dad? Uncountable days, probably. "You know that Nehal Rahim Khan took my brother's life and you couldn't stop her, you couldn't protect Ashar. You destroyed everything."

"She is a nonsense girl, a psychopath, a stubborn. She is mentally ill. She is dangerous! She could harm you too. Why did you meet her? I protected you, otherwise, she could harm you too. I stopped you from reopening the case but you never heard me, you started writing that nonsense book. Are you crazy?"

"You are wrong! Every time you are wrong! You could have taken revenge from her. But you prioritized money and your benefits as always. I lost my brother. Do you know how I feel that day, when I lost Ashar? You can't feel anything. You can never feel what I felt. Every day, I miss him, I feel alone. What was my mistake? Mom is not here, Ashar also left me alone. And you! You always wanted to

use me, to dictate me as you wanted. You always wanted me to join Artistic Holding so that you can dictate me. I am tired, I am so tired. My life wasn't supposed to be like that. I was happy with Ashar when mom left us. Now, I think, she did right. She left us. If she wouldn't take this step that day, she would have died as well with Ashar." She stopped for a while. Her eyes were burning. Her heart rate was faster.

"Your mom left you but look who's still here? I am with you. All facilities are here, every luxury! Every luxury of life. What else you desired for?"

"Do you think, this luxurious life is enough? Do you think these luxuries, these benefits, these facilities are enough to fulfill every space, every hole in your life? No, they aren't. You can never know that how important is family, how important are feelings and emotions! I was turning into a heartless person like you but now, from today, right from this second, I will give importance to my feelings over everything. Just like you give importance to your money, power and fame over everything."

The world was shaking around her, she couldn't put her steps on the ground and then, she didn't know what happened! She fainted on the floor and then, everything disappeared. Black and disappearance! Colorless, eyes closed and everything turned off.

When she again opened her eyes, she couldn't feel anything, she was somewhere else, this was not Fareed Awan's study room. She again closed her eyes. After a glimpse of time, she again reopened her eyes and now, she could see Zaid Jahangir sitting beside her bed. She saw the room with white walls. She was in a private room of hospital.

"Miral, how are you feeling now?" Zaid saw her and asked immediately with care in his eyes.

"Better." She could only say this.

The other day, Fareed Awan came and Zaid told him everything that he wanted to marry Miral Fareed. Fareed Awan was silent, spot face. No answer, no reaction. Zaid wasn't expecting that he could give such a cold reaction but maybe, it was Miral's condition that he had to control.

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That night, Miral had a breakdown, her blood pressure was too low and she fainted. She was in stress. Zaid was surprised to know about her condition and couldn't resist and came to meet Miral in the hospital. She was unconscious for about a day. Doctors wanted to keep her under observation but she didn't want to stay in hospital anymore. Suffocation grew.

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Life needs a hope, a single one might be,
And that hope needs another hope.
Extemporaneous efforts, untouched, unrehearsed with desultory,
Cantankerous, unhappy, unsatisfied, annoyed.
Annoyed from being hopeless?
Hopes are born, constructed, created...
One strives with thunder to gain hope.
Galumph, move, further, ahead faster,
Towards your ease with filled jars of motivation.
Intrinsically, being attentive to that spark,
That spark, you always had worked for!

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Unpredictable things would take your way,
Would adopt protagonist role,
in the untold episode of your story,
Would try even harder to make you fall,
To make you surrender towards your fate!
These joys were only temporary,
So were the sorrows you had.
The globe, keeping you in that undefined circle,
Compelling you, to move around and around,
Pushing, like you were a compulsory part.
Like you were a dream that never diminishes,
As if these dreams must always be centralized!
That story, words, emotions weren't finished,
Scratched, untold and stayed incomplete.
Producing hope, like growing colorful flowers,
in the barren field or in the garden of your story.
Coloring life with the colors of hope,
Adding some more colors, few more desires.
With strong intentions and powerful spark of hope.

That hope, witnessed in those eyelids,
Present in that heart like a behest!
You weren't tucked in that globe,
You were there to find your way, your option,
And your ray of hope!

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"I want this doll." She was stubborn and couldn't resist for her favorite things. But are humans considered as entities? As objects? Loss of a favorite thing or a human! Can it be equitable?

Nehal Rahim Khan committed a mistake or better say, a sin! The murderer of Ashar Fareed. She was in her room and memories were hitting her head like thrones. She wasn't able to breathe. Wasn't able to think. She destroyed herself behind that one man. She gave up on everything. Those confessions destroyed everything. But what to do now? Was any option left? This story has to be ended. This has to end up as soon as possible. She was tired of this drama. What was next line-up?

Her parents left, her grandfather left and now, she was about to...

She cried that night when Ashar Fareed was killed by her. Her last cry, her last tears which never appeared again. She suffered. Tears again started appearing in her eyes but she gently rubbed her eyes. Her mascara was distorted like her whole life. She was strong, she had to be strong.

"I didn't do anything wrong!" She whispered. Was she able to trust her own words? "No one can give me punishment? I don't deserve! How can he refuse me? He couldn't, no one can refuse Nehal." Now, she wasn't whispering to herself but was screaming. The maids outside her room could hear that all but couldn't interfere in between. The inner turmoil was increasing and was turning up into a fatal disease. Confusion, disturbance, violent agitation.

She saw her phase in the mirror. How chaotic were these memories! In a state of upheaval, another memory started screaming in her head. "I want this, that's it!" Stubborn young girl wasn't changing her mood. The doll was already taken by the other customer and it was the last piece. Then,

Nehal's father bought another doll for her but at night, she threw that doll out from the window. And the car crashed that doll. It died. Nehal smiled. "It should have died!"

The drawers were opened and she held it in her hand. That gun. The memories fade away. "I have no energy to hate anymore, it's all ended. It's irrelevant! Not everything is worth fixing. Move on!" But was it easy to move on from the sins you have committed? That inner turmoil. How things worked out for her but still lacking inner satisfaction. She again looked at the pistol in her hand. Already decided and then...

Blood, blood and endless life comes to a finale for Nehal Rahim Khan. The soul left the body!

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Miral was discharged from the hospital. Fareed Awan was out of city. He doesn't want to face Miral right now, maybe. He was sure that she would lose her temper again if he met her.

She was at her friend's house. At Shehzil's house. The house wasn't a luxury one but this house holds peace, the peace she wanted to have, which wasn't present in that luxurious 'Awan House'. She doesn't want to go to Awan house right now. Zaid often visited her. She remained silent, only giving few, small and short answers to him. But he didn't stop visiting Miral. Where his ego went? He was quite changed! She couldn't make sense. But now she was trying to be normal. Coming out of that shock that Nehal had killed... she couldn't make sense ahead. She wanted to take a break from all this bitter reality. It was all too exhausting suddenly. She was making coffee for herself in the kitchen but then couldn't move her hands, she tilted her head back and looked around at the TV lounge and the news being played repeatedly on the channel.

"Famous chairwoman of Aquarius Textile, Nehal Rahim Khan committed suicide." Shehzil was watching the headlines and she was in the kitchen. Shehzil didn't know about Miral's meeting with Nehal and Nehal's truth. But Miral... she couldn't breathe. The air was exhausting. She

died! The one who killed Ashar died herself because she didn't want to get punishment from anyone else. Only, she can punish herself and he did what she wanted to. Perfect! Suicide, murder, mystery! No other mystery. Everything was solved. Miral went out from the kitchen, took her bag and mobile, and was about to leave the house when she heard Shehzil's voice. "Miral, where are you going?"

"I need fresh air." She said loudly and then, went out of that small house.

The news reporter was still reporting the death news of Nehal Rahim Khan. And this bulletin and this news was to be continued for about a week and then, everyone would forget Nehal Rahim Khan. Self-punishment was never a bad option for her. Shehzil was still looking sadly at the TV screen.

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She was in the café, sitting in front of him. She was looking quite different from normal days. Her eyes lacking shine

and brightness, a completely different Miral Fareed sitting in front of Zaid Jahangir.

“I am glad that you came here.” Zaid initiated the conversation as always. He knew that Miral wasn’t well up till now. But he wanted her to be expressive, if not in front of the whole world then, at least in front of him.

“She died.” Her voice was broken. Zaid looked up at her with expressionless eyes.

“I know!” He replied back. Miral astoundingly looked up in his eyes. Was he aware about everything? Does he know about Miral’s last meeting with Nehal? Was he aware about every truth? How can he? “She committed suicide but you don’t have to worry about it. Don’t take tension. Everything will be fine.”

“You know everything?”

“Yes!” He paused for a moment and then said what truth was. This time, he didn’t want to hide anything from Miral.

“But how?” She looked confuse now.

“Fareed Awan told me.” His face was expressionless for a moment while he took her father’s name and Miral noticed

that. “When you were in hospital, he told me about everything.”

“She killed my brother mercilessly. How can she die so easily now?”

“Miral, it was fate. Bad decisions make good stories. You need to make yourself confident to stand again in front of this merciless world.” His words were like a warm breeze in chilliest weather.

“She came to my house and she told me everything. She was fearless that day like everything was already decided. How can’t I reach her?”

“You couldn’t reach her because she was sharp, she was clever! But you know what... Miral you still have got that piece of innocence in yourself. You aren’t made for taking revenge. I know you love your brother but your kindness and your innocence overcome everything.”

“Dad stopped me and I had to withdraw from the case. He doesn’t want me to drag anything to the court. I started writing a book in the name of justice but look there’s no

way ahead. I think I lost this battle.” A tear split on her cheeks.

“You can still publish that book.”

“I guess, you should say that Miral don’t do anything now. Everything is over.” She laughed sarcastically.

“Why will I stop you Miral! I am Zaid Jahangir, not Fareed Awan. I will always be there by your side to share all your worries and sadness.” And this one sentence changed everything for a moment for Miral Fareed. (Miral, you don’t have to worry about anything. Your brother is here to support you always, till the last breathe of my life, I’ll be by your side!)

Ashar used to say this to her but now, moment changed, characters changed, air changed and she caught those light brownish eyes staring at her. Her heart felt a bit light. She was feeling normal or at least tried to feel normal. The person sitting there beside her was the one who wouldn’t leave her now. Her heart said that she should trust him, he wouldn’t break her trust. He was there for her, he was

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there to support her and finally, everything felt a bit different.

“Coffee?” The man with those light brownish eyes asked politely and she couldn’t refuse him. How can Miral refuse Zaid Jahangir? How can she? She could never refuse him. Pure hearts always win in the end and Zaid Jahangir was holding a pure heart for Miral Fareed. She knew that and for that, no assurance was required now.

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She worked hard for writing that one book and for gathering evidences as well. She wanted to stay busier to avoid any unusual thought to overtake her mind. So, she made her schedule even busier than before. She gathered few evidences against Nehal Rahim Khan like her company’s corruption and her overshadowed money laundering cases as well which were kept hidden but now, it was easy to buy the most important, closest and loyal workers of Nehal’s company to get more evidences for the book. Money can do anything, it could even buy the loyalty as well. Fareed Awan knew about Miral’s activities but

didn't take any action. He was mostly busy in the affairs of Artistic Holding and was usually attending several meetings in different countries. He was quite busy these months while Miral never concentrated on what he was busy at. Carl used to report her sometimes but she was as usual not interested. But Carl was obviously interested in what Miral was about to, what would be her next step, how she is going to everything on her own! Ahh! Carl and his never ending curiosity would drown him one day. These were the remarks of Miral Fareed about Mr. Carl. But Carl never cared before. Was he born in this world to care about such things? Absolutely not! Miral and her remarks were never in his list of worrying. "Thank you for the sweetest compliments, Miss Miral Fareed Awan." Cal and his replies. You can't do anything when the person does have brain but no senses to use. Useless! Yes, I am talking about Carl.

Zaid Jahangir's support for Miral Fareed was way beyond the limitations. He helped her to find and gather different CCTV footages of Nehal's Aquarius Textile, Ashar's office

and of Artistic Holding. Those old footages which were deleted or were missing a few points. Zaid's efforts helped in recovering those footages as he took help from his friend who was good in computers.

That evening, they were out for a walk and Miral always took out time to meet him, despite her tough schedule. He couldn't refuse Zaid Jahangir obviously. Zaid knew about Miral's tough routine ad her hard work and would always want to cherish her mood. Efforts matter. "You know, I haven't taken any favor from anyone but I did it for the first time... for you only!" He said this to Miral and she looked in his light brownish eyes for a second and then, she couldn't maintain the eye contact and looked away. (Oh look! How beautiful that road is, oh look how astonishing those kids are! Miral Fareed, you shouldn't be looking in his eyes.)

An eye contact with Zaid Jahangir was the most difficult job for Miral Fareed, those eyes always make her look confuse and Zaid knew that she would look away. He could only smile on this and what else!

“Oh, you don’t have to do it for me!”

“Why not?”

“Your ego would get hurt! I don’t want Zaid Jahangir to take favor from others for me.”

“It’s not ego. And I can do anything for you!”

“Anything?”

“Yes. You can test me too.”

“Why will I test you?”

“Only you can.”

“No, I don’t want to.”

“Oh! I got you!”

“What?”

“You want to say that you trust me.”

“Oh, did I say that?”

“You should trust me, Miral.”

“Okay, give me one reason to trust you.”

“Because in this world, I can deceive anyone but not you! I can never lose you and I know, if I break your trust, I would lose Miral Fareed.”

“Am I that important to you?”

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“More than you think.” And here Miral Fareed was speechless. Nowadays, Zaid Fareed was able to make her speechless with his words but his eyes, oh those light brownish eyes and the feelings hidden inside those eyes were true. Those feelings were absolutely there for Miral Fareed only. She stood at her place. How can she move?

“Miral?”

“Hmm…” She was in her own thoughts, lost somewhere.

“Let’s go, eat something!”

“Okay.” She smiled and two strangers found a good restaurant to eat something. That evening walks and then, the dinner was special for both of them. It was part of their routine. They hesitated to showcase and express their feelings but both knew what they felt for each other. The moonlight also acknowledged, smiling at them.

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That night, she got another clue and that too a colossal one. That clue directed towards the secret linkage between Talha Baig and Nehal Rahim Khan. She wasn’t in shock as

she had always seen that guy named 'Talha Baig' as a suspicious person. That linkage wasn't normal. That 'Talha Baig', partner and shareholder of artistic holding. A confrontation was necessary and kitschy at this point.

A day after, she was as usual walking with the tall and handsome, Zaid Jahangir in that park when her phone rang which caused vexatious in the peaceful atmosphere.

"Who's calling?"

"Talha Baig's assistant!"

"Why is he calling you, Miral?"

"I need to meet him, that's why."

"Do you think that he was involved in Ashar's murder?"

And Miral nodded her head and pick up the call.

She ended up the call and looked in a hurry now with her words. "I need to go now."

"But where?"

"To meet Talha Baig." She wasn't worried but also looked like if she was thinking about something deeply.

"Right now?" He asked curiously.

"Yes." Miral replied in a calmer tone.

“I will go with you, it’s not safe!”

“It’s alright, I can handle it myself. You don’t have to go with me.” She was relaxed but Zaid wasn’t. How could it be so simple? Something was suspicious! A bit vivid. He couldn’t stop Miral and could only do what she wanted. To wait for her.

She went towards her car which was parked and then, the engine was started. But Zaid Jahangir couldn’t stay there like coward. He couldn’t wait here. He has to protect Miral. And he will protect her at any cause. It wasn’t a miniscule thing that Talha Baig wanted to meet her at this hour of the day. Something terribly atrocious was hidden. Now, Zaid’s car was at a petit distance from Miral’s car as he decided to not leave her alone.

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It was room with white colored walls, no pictures hanging, no colors, no brightness, and no light even. Everything was absent like the peace which has been hindered by the incident. Everything turned up to be truncate, in a mess. She was running and running, faster, abruptly, rapidly and

non-stop. Then, she stopped. The view changed but melancholy and despondency remained alive. She was now sitting on the muddy floor, in the mud, on the ground looking at his grave. Gaze at Ashar's grave. That terrible eyes went on splitting nothing but only tears. She was crying. She was alone. Nobody was here. But she still survived. The enormous view changed and now, she was with him, with Zaid but then, he left and everywhere there was blood. Colossal, red flash blood covering the ground. She was terrified, afraid, frightened. And then, within a second, her eyes opened after a series of terrible dreams that made her whole body in sweat. She was sweating. Her eyes were wet and she was in pain. She looked around but nobody was there in room while she was laying on the bed. She was alone in that hospital's room. Her right hand was in pain. There was a drip attached to her left hand. She couldn't recognize the room where she was laying down. She was here. Where was she right now? And those white walls, oh! She was in hospital. But this injury! Oh, this injury was... she didn't know what the date today was, she

didn't know for how long she had been here in the hospital. She wanted to get up but the painful right hand couldn't allow her. She tried to remember that what happened with her and then she remembered... that night when she went to meet Talha Baig. That night... that incident and this injury. Try to remember Miral. Think!

And then, the doctors came inside. "I am glad that you wake up, Miss Miral." The head doctor was now asking her that how she is feeling, is she feeling pain in her hand. She was in pain, she told the doctor.

"What happened to me, doctor? This injury...?"

"It is a gunshot injury. Someone wanted to kill you that night." A gunshot, kill, murder. Miral looked terrified.

"Wanted to kill me?" She whispered to herself. "For how many days, I am here?" Another question asked.

"You were brought here last night." The nurse replied this time. The doctor left the room.

"Last night..." She whispered again.

"Last night"

She parked her car at some distance from that tall building which was standing steadily with all its glorious lights. Then, she walked towards the entrance gate of the building where four guards were attentively checking the ids of all the new comers. They were even asking a few details about the person who used to enter that building. They even asked Miral some questions. “Mam, your reason of coming here?”

“I’m here to meet Mr. Talha Baig.” The security guard asked for her id card. She handed over her id card which was returned to her immediately. Now, she could enter that building. She was about to enter the building where Talha Baig’s assistant called her when a noise broke every silence. That was a gunshot noise. Yes, the pistol was triggered. The shot was obviously set for her. A presage for her. She immediately felt pain in her right arm. She wasn’t able to stand anymore. The security alarms rang. Emergency! She was the target, obviously, Miral Fareed was the target. And then, all her courage, her energy busted up and she fell down on the floor. Blood coming up

from her right arm. She wasn't completely faint but the last thing she saw, was Zaid Jahangir running towards Miral Fareed because he never left her alone. He was with him and that was a surety. And then, her eyes were slowly closing, everything turned black and all lights gone. As Miral Fareed fainted with bloody arm.

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Zaid entered the room with flowers in his hand while she was in her thoughts. Then, she looked up at him with wet eyes and her gaze fell onto those flowers which were in his hand and he was putting them on the side table. Those were fresh, red roses. "Are you fine, now? Look, I brought red roses for you. I thought you would love it. You love flowers, don't you?" He asked. He was relaxed and calmer.
"You were chasing me that night." How direct this girl was!
"Miral, you need to take rest. Don't take any burden on yourself."
"Answer me, please. I want to hear you." She was about to cry, Zaid felt.

“I told you that night, not to go alone. Anyways. I can’t see you like this. There’s no need to cry. Just relax. Everything is fine. Under control. Please, don’t take stress. It’s not good for your mental wellbeing. Recover fast. You need to take care of your injured hand as well.” Zaid changed the topic deliberately because he knew that Miral would mind if she got to know that he was chasing her that night even when she told him not to.

“You are changing the topic, Zaid.” Miral was direct as always. She wasn’t crying but a bit emotional after seeing Zaid caring for her like this.

“Yes, I was chasing you because I can’t leave you alone. I already knew that you could be in danger. I can’t trust anyone if it’s about you, Miral. I can’t trust a person like Talha Baig.”

“Talha Baig... Was he involved in this all?” Zaid looked in those worrisome eyes and had to acknowledge that how beautiful they were. Her eyes were beautiful. Zaid couldn’t look around and he doesn’t want to look anywhere else.

“Police has arrested him.”

“What?”

“Talha Baig, your last enemy has been arrested. Police got the evidence that he was involved in this incident. He wanted to kill you. And he was with Nehal in all her deeds. Even, in Ashar’s murder as well, he planned everything with Nehal.”

“How did police have evidence?” Now, she was able to think logically as she came out of earlier shock.

“Fareed Awan reported the incident to the police that night and police investigated the whole matter. Your dad gave them all proofs against Talha Baig. He even, ended up every partner shipping with him before. He is no more a shareholder or a partner of Artistic Holding.”

“Baba…”

“Did you mind?” He came near her bed, dragged the chair and sat on it.

“What?”

“That I chased you that night.”

“Should I mind?”

“No!” He said immediately.

“Why?”

“Because…” He was still looking in those big, beautiful and deep eyes.

“Because?”

“I can’t see anger for myself in these beautiful eyes.” Miral had to look away. Oh, this man!

“Zaid Jahangir, I need to tell you that this is hospital.”

“I also need to acknowledge something to you, Miss Miral Fareed.”

“What is that?” Miral was curious to know about.

“Your eyes are the most beautiful view for me in this world.” And she smiled at last. A pure, true and gentle smile. Zaid Jahangir successfully cherished her mood. Only, he could do this for her. Her eyes were still wet but now, the shine and spark of her eyes were back.

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This was Awan House, she was in her room. She was discharged from the hospital and requires one month for the recovery. When Fareed Awan entered the house, asked

servant about Miral. “She is in her room.” The head maid replied.

“Didn’t she come out from her room?”

“No, she even did breakfast and lunch in her room.” Fareed Awan couldn’t say a word and moved towards his study.

At the dinner table, he again asked for Miral. Now, this was the routine, she rarely came out from her room and faced her father. She usually stayed in her room. Zaid used to meet her daily. Fareed Awan knew that but he didn’t stop Miral from meeting Zaid. He couldn’t even stop. He couldn’t say a word because he knew that Miral was only open to Zaid and no one else.

He left his table and went up towards the stairs where Miral’s room was present. They need to talk. Interaction is important to sort out things, to understand each other and to clear the misunderstandings. No communication means no solutions. Communicating leads to deriving solutions and cleaning up all the mess around you. He wanted to talk to Miral. He had been avoiding her since she came back to Awan house after being discharged from the hospital. But

confrontation was important to the utmost point now. He slightly opened the door. The room's lights were opened and she was reading a book. She looked up at her father's face which was spot and emotionless. He came near the sofa where she was sitting and settle down.

"I was waiting for you." She said in a lighter tone but Fareed Awan could hear her easily.

"You should have come to me, then."

"Why? I was waiting for you, so you should have to come to me, dad."

"How stubborn you are!"

"I am Miral Fareed Awan, I have to be because after all, I am your daughter."

"Why were you waiting for me?"

"Because I need to thank you."

"Thank me? But why?"

"Because you took action against Talha Baig."

"He was a criminal. I had no choice but to take actions against him because he tried to harm you. How could I hold him free when I knew his intentions?"

“That’s why I wanted to say, thank you dad.”

“Who told you about Talha Baig and all?”

“Zaid.” He remained silent for a second.

“You like him, don’t you?” This was a sudden confession.

“I hope you don’t have any problem.” She was afraid for a moment, what if her dad said to leave him. Can someone leave or forget breathing? She wasn’t sure if her dad is going to accept this for her or not. She knew very well that he doesn’t like Zaid Jahangir. But what can she do? She can’t do anything but can just hope.

“It’s your life, Miral. I don’t want to put any sort of pressure on you. If you feel, he’s the one, then there is nothing more to negate about it.” Things turned up unexpectedly. This was fate and you can’t change it. Unexpected things were always the part of her life.

“Now, come and eat dinner with me. Aren’t you bore sitting in your room all the time?” And she smiled. While, Fareed Awan’s face was still spot and emotionless but she couldn’t feel any negativity around her.

Ashar's enemies and his murderers end was shamelessly exposed in front of everyone and she was relaxed as life was coming back to point, slowly and gradually.

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After one year:

It was bright, sunny day. The fall season brought new turn ups and hopes with a lot of expected results as well. She was too ready in a white colored top with black skirt, high heels and light makeup. Her beauty was enhanced with the flowers that she was wearing in her hairs, those white flowers. It was a big day for her as it was the day of publishing. Her book was being published today. She named the event as 'book inauguration ceremony'. A lot of famous writers, authors, media houses, journalists and famous people were invited in the ceremony. While, Zaid has been with her throughout her journey of writing the major part of this book. This book inauguration ceremony was held at 'Beach Luxury Hotel', a famous hotel in

Karachi. She was excited for today but a bit nervous as well which was normal.

“Are you nervous?” Zaid Jahangir entered the room where she was holding the first book that she wrote, that too about her beloved brother ‘Ashar Fareed’.

“Why are you so direct?”

“Because I have to as my indirectness is not liked by miss Miral Fareed.”

“Oh, you care about me.”

“We are officially engaged, madam. Shouldn’t I care about you?”

“You should but remember, I am not a small kid.” And he laughed. He rarely, laughed but whenever he does, she couldn’t do anything but to stare at him. And she could stare at him for the rest of her life like this.

“Why are you staring at me? Am I looking much more handsome today?” This character of Zaid Jahangir was only alive for Miral Fareed only. Otherwise, he was famous for his attitude, his seriousness, and his self-obsession and for his argumentative nature. Fun, joy and being waggish

were not in the script for Zaid Jahangir, especially for this world.

“If self-obsession had a face.”

“You never complimented me, Miral.” He faked as if he was sad that Miral didn’t give him any compliment that, Oh! Zaid! You are damn handsome or you are looking smart. Oh! You look commendable today. Why will she? Was there a need to express every time in front of this self-obsessed man? There was truly a need but Miral Fareed didn’t feel this way.

“Why will I? You know that, I am not expressive.” She turned back and looked in the mirror. She could see disappointment on Zaid’s face and she couldn’t resist her smile.

“I see! But I am expressive and I am never bored of complimenting you.” She smiled at him.

“I also complimented you, you know!”

“Oh, when? Why couldn’t I remember?”

“In my diary.” Zaid was tantalized this time.

“Oh… then, I must read it one day. Will you give me your diary to read?”

Miral thought about it for a second and then her ‘yes’ was enough to satisfy Zaid Jahangir.

The book publishing ceremony started in the evening and Miral looked pretty confident in her style. She was attending the guests and was unconsciously waiting for someone as well. Someone who? Waiting for someone or something is always vexatious. She also had to deliver her speech in front of the audience. She got onto the stage and the speech began but that ‘someone’ didn’t arrive. Her eyes looked everywhere, searched for the person in large audience but couldn’t find. “He won’t come today.” She reminded herself and set the mice for herself.

“Good evening everyone. As you all know, I am Miral Fareed Awan. I am glad that you all join me here for my first book publication. I want to thank all of you. I would like to say that today, my purpose of returning back to Pakistan has been completed. I have achieved the most difficult goal of my life and that was to attain justice for my

brother ‘Ashar Fareed Awan’. Unfortunately, the courts and judicial system couldn’t do that for me but I never quit. Quitting or to make a coward exit was never an option for me. I was roped up with the promise I made to myself. Sometimes, promises are very burdensome, you want to return back but couldn’t, you want to find another way for yourself but couldn’t, you even want to end up things and break promises but couldn’t. How helpless a human becomes? Some people choose to disappear and live a quiet and private life but as I told that this wasn’t an option for me. How ridiculous! Most of the people tried to stop me, saying that Ashar won’t come back even if you file a case and win the case. But I was stubborn I guess.” A small air of laughter across the audience. She continued speaking but noticed that he arrived here and was listening her speech. Fareed Awan was there in her ‘book inauguration ceremony’. She looked at him as he would disappear if she looked away. After all, his presence serves as personifying her courage.

“But today, justice has been served and maybe, I found myself again. Remember that there is always another way, you just have to find one. You need to be unstoppable, even if you lost everyone here in the way of your journey of attaining. I am glad that I did something for my brother and this book reveals all the culprits’ names and the names of those who were responsible for killing not only Ashar Fareed but also killed justice in this country. Thank you.” The speech was over and she came down the stage. Fareed Awan was near the stage. She came near to him, “I am thankful that you came today.” She didn’t want to cry but couldn’t resist from showing her teary eyes. “Miral, I am proud of you.” He said and then, left the event. She stared at him. Time has distanced them in a very unfortunate way. “Baba, you couldn’t do anything for Ashar, it’s alright because I did it for him.” And she smiled in the end. A very sad, melancholy and despondent smile.

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“Our eyes meet when we stare at the moon.” She was in her room and was writing in her diary. The only way, Miral Fareed could express what she felt and what she was feeling.

“I found myself again, did you hear? I found the old Miral. How lucky! Have you ever felt joy in listening to those chirping voice of birds? Those cute, tiny sparrows. Have you ever wondered, why nature always fascinates me? Why am I always inclined towards the moon, sky, flowers and stars? Why? Because... it heals me. It helps me to avoid bitter and exhausting realities. Healing how important it is to heal. Nature heals more than humans could do it for you. Nature always compelled me to avoid black and white colors of world’s reality. A lot of miserable aspects of life make you bitter and salty too, but it’s fine. Focusing more on some bright colors, healing your own soul, your own heart and your unsolved emotions which have blown away multiple mysteries! This is for your own better. How important it is to dedicate your own words to yourself. These words that I am writing down in my diary at this

hour, probably at 12 a.m. in my rough handwriting are never enough. Words are never enough but they contain some hidden meanings too that only the author would know. Some words, moments remain in heart to never come out on paper, in front of the world. Astonished, you should be. I read the word or better say a phrase 'Endless noises'. Can you feel the chaos around you? Ahh! That overthinking, contemplation, observations and thinking silently;

In the end, what goes on heart can never be described. I want to say that, I miss Ashar. I miss him every single day. My heart always cries for him, for his miserable death. He left me so earlier!

Luckily, I have got Zaid. The person I never wanted to lose. The day, I saw him for the first time in that café was the day of love. Everything was so perfect about that day and... about him as well. He has changed, I am not sure that this change is for me or for some other cause but I am satisfied. I am learning to build trust slowly. And I trust him. He turned me into a girl who used to have firm believe on love.

I always wanted to have a dreamy love life and now, my dream is Zaid Jahangir. We are no more strangers! The important thing for me is 'together ending'. I don't want to focus on tragic or happy endings. There is only one difference in life and fairytales, life doesn't always have happy endings. Baba is as usual busy in his company 'Artistic Holding'. Soon I'll be joining the company too and this time, nobody has forced me to join, it's my own will. Well, baba looks satisfied but I know that deep down he's in deep turmoil. Regrets never leave you, they synthesize in your weak moments. I am going to fulfill dad's wish. He always wanted me to join Artistic Holding and look, tomorrow is my first day. He wanted to see me, ruling like him but still, a lot needs to be learned by me.

You cannot escape your fate but escaping is also a part of fate. Hope is also a part of fate. Hope... it is the greatest response of your goodness. Have you ever seen those eyes looking up at the sky? What's there in those eyes? It's hope! The hope that everything would get better one day. Hope was one of the thing that stood by my side when

everyone else left me alone. I was also having hope that everything will be sorted in my life once I publish this book and look I succeeded. I was born to win! Hope keeps me motivated and dedicated. It made me consistent. It made me strong. It refined the best version out of me. I was the girl to oscillate between darkness and lightness of life but now, I hold up hope above all. A girl who creates her own glory in her own ways, eliminating toxic people from life permanently. She chose herself at last. I luckily, chose myself in the end. I chose the dimmy, gracious streets for the rest of my days. I built my own story with a motif and with my own perspective."

The night passed ahead, turning into the midnight and the pen girl kept on filling those white pages with black ink. The strangers were meant to be known to each other as it was all the game of fate.

The End

Strangers by Ayesha Asif

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