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Conversations of the Waning Moon

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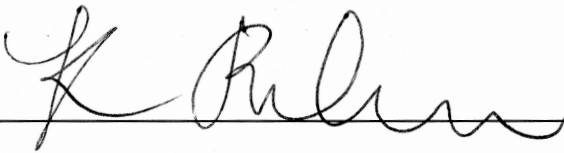
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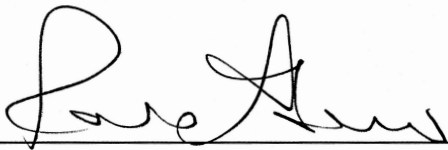
This is to certify that the thesis prepared by Anam Fatima Ismail, entitled
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Conversations With the Waning Moon

A thesis made to fulfill a requirement for the Creative Writing Minor

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Thanks

First and foremost, I want to thank God for blessing me with an eye for art and drawing me closer to the world of writing. I would like to thank my parents, Anwar Ismail and Syeda Fatima, for teaching me how to withstand pain at a young age, as well as training me to be patient and humble no matter the situation. I would like to thank my friends (and fellow poets), Sarah Gammard and Kiet Chung for setting high standards of writing that inspires me to touch the skies with my words as they do. Without the unconditional love and support from my friends and family, I would never have thought there could have been hope for me to continue to live so vicariously with a purpose. Life's constant trials against me have been cruel, but without the ability to write, I would not have been able to bear though any of it.

In fact, I would have never thought I was a decent writer until Jonathan Moody selected me as a recipient for the Truman Capote Scholarship for the 2015-2016 school year. I would like to thank him for finding potential in my writing more than I ever could. Because of him and the scholarship, I was inspired to take classes from Mr. Whitaker and Dr. Obradovic at Xavier University of Louisiana, who helped me extensively improve the quality of my writing with their courses, as well as introducing me to new styles of poetry. They always challenged me beyond my comfort zones, as well as understood me without me having to say a word. The following year, Lola Haskins inspired me to keep writing as she selected my work for another Truman Capote Scholarship. I appreciate her seeing the future and acknowledging my improvement.

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to thank everyone else I have met on my journey that has influenced my writing, whether it be the boys that broke my heart, lost loved ones, wonderful poets, or even the people who always found happiness for me. Lastly, I would like to thank Xavier University of Louisiana for blessing me with such great opportunities to rekindle with such great art programs I did not think I could have encountered after high school.

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Conversations With The Waning Moon

Anam Fatima Ismail

Xavier University of Louisiana

Introduction

I am Pakistani-American born in Kansas City, Missouri, and raised in New Orleans Louisiana. I have seen the luxuries that come with life, as well as the harsh realities. Living in both worlds has given me a vision to see life in different perspectives. It was not until I was seventeen when I discovered poetry after trying to cope with Borderline Personality Disorder, alongside bitter life lessons of nostalgia, love, and enlightenment. As I continued to write, I developed an infatuation of using my poetry as a voice to illustrate what emotions are—whether they are mine or not. Because of that, I want to be able to share stories. I did not realize that I had a niche for writing until I won the Truman Capote scholarship award (twice!), which was a very humbling experience. For once, I felt a real calling in my life, so I invested into more poetry. The more I began to write, the more I discovered my style. Aside from Sylvia Plath, Rupi Kaur, and Rumi, I discovered several contemporary writers along my journey that gave me great inspiration, including Jonathan Moody and Carolyn Hembree. Sometimes I wonder if I will ever be as great as them; still, I find myself constantly writing.

When I first began writing, I wrote many haikus to incorporate more “telling than showing”, as well as condense my wordiness when writing essays for high school. Because of this, I developed a rhythm of consistent stanzas and syllables that brought forth a flow into my poetry. My poetry then was more about my own problems and feelings. Taking classes at Xavier University of Louisiana has helped me understand more forms of poetry, as well as finding joy in getting feedback for my writing. The most important thing I learned from my creative writing classes was that poetry is not bound to any kind of restrictions or rules, which inspired me to write freely and artistically. While I still keep somewhat of a syllabus

and stanza rhythm, I have incorporated techniques such as aeration, line-breaks, and illustration to make my poems livelier while keeping an aesthetic structure. Applying these into my writing gave me a sense of style in my writing as it became more structured. I also learned many different kinds of poetry that I never knew existed, such as ekphrastic, personification, and epistolary. These serve as frames for my writing and the different perspectives I take into consideration. I realized that I have more to share about others than myself sometimes. Today, I try to make my poetry convey a message worthy to the reader using my experiences and knowledge, compared to how I used to write about myself. As I learn more, I plan on keep writing. I hope one day, my words will reach into someone who needs to feed her soul with poetry.

The title of my thesis, *Conversations with the Waning Moon*, represents the time I write the most, which is late at night. At these times, I feel vulnerable, and I experience an abundance of emotions that are raw, which also gnaw on my heart. Those are the times where the most peculiar of thoughts, worries, and stress, slowly creep in through my bedroom door. I wonder about the lives of those I have loved, and those who have left my life. Those I have reached out to would always tell me to go to sleep the moment my emotions began spiraling downward. However, I learned over time that I cannot avoid what I feel; instead I realized that it *is* okay to feel so deeply. I learned to spend this time staying late and watching the moon as I meditate on my life and everything going on around the world. I take advantage of these raw emotions I feel to illustrate a world which I see, and while it may be dark there at times, accepting and forgiving myself for the way I feel has helped me find hope. It's silly to consider that the moon as a metaphor for a companion that listens to me, but the idea of a waning moon illustrates a release of negative emotions and a rejuvenation of me as a better person.

This collection consists of four sections, Jetlag, Lullaby, Insomnia, and Goodnight./ Goodnight!, representing the process of sleep, and the things that impel it in the night time. In this collection, each section has seven, five, four, and eight poems respectively, with a total of twenty-four poems. There is also a “notes” section to further explain phrases, translations, and words that some may not understand. As mentioned earlier, there are techniques I have incorporated into my writing; however, my word choice is something I consider carefully. Language is something that intrigues me because personally, I feel like everything sounds nicer outside of the English language, but also because I am especially enamored by words that do not have a singular word for the English translation. “Rithubhedam” is an example of a Hindi word that translates closely to what would be referred to as a change in season. Most of my poems also use alliteration, which is because of my love for the way words and vocabulary flow in a sentence. One of the most common forms of poetry I use is ekphrastic poetry because it ties in my fascination for the arts. I am still exploring forms,⁴ but I tend to get excited trying a new style or form in a poem, which helps make no two poems exactly alike, even if they may have similar themes.

The first part, Jetlag opens up to explore culture and also includes themes about family and socio-human interactions. Jetlag is the feeling of exhaustion experienced while traveling as a person’s biological clock tries to adjust into new timezones. My first poem, “Thanksgiving for the New Age,” is a satirical epistolary poem that mocks the first-world problems of Americans and how much it is influenced by capitalism. “I Have Not Been to This Park in Years” shows the ingratitude of those who live in the first world, and how our environment is disrespected and ignored. Whenever I visit Pakistan, it is almost surreal because the russet roads, stone houses, and even the side of the steering wheel of the car is different from what I am used to in America. Moreover, it is just so much simpler there because the problems there, such as losing power every day for a couple of hours, are

confronted with spending time cooking, visiting neighbors, and spending time outside of the house because everyone is so accustomed to this; meanwhile while these conditions would be considered annoying compared to what my peers in social media complain about daily in America. This sets a contrast as I move to the next few poems, where I begin talking about what it is like in Karachi, Pakistan based on my own experiences and listening to stories about my family. What I want to clarify with my audience, though, is how grateful I feel to be in America at times, but the life in Pakistan is enjoyable as well because it is vivid and allows for socio-cultural interactions. Meanwhile, “I Long for Home,” discusses the latest wave of Syrian refugees having to flee their country. Having to leave Pakistan makes me feel empathy for them, thinking of how hard it must be to have to migrate. With this, Jetlag also highlights how strong family bonding has such a great impact on one making sacrifices for this or her loved ones. “Night Terrors” and “Mid-day Serenade” illustrate the cruel realities, such as child prostitution and depression, some must face because they feel so strongly for their family.

The second part, Lullaby gives advice to readers that I wish someone would have given me. Lullabies are given in comfort in order to make children fall asleep. The central theme for this section is letting go, and knowing when to stop making sacrifices for others, no matter how attached you may be. Making constant sacrifices can sometimes be grueling and keep a person from moving on in life, similar to how sometimes the words of others may be soothing, but often keep one from falling asleep. Most of the poems in this section use the metaphor of wings, whether it be a butterfly or bird. This is to symbolize that we have opportunities in life to soar skies, but often keep ourselves behind for the sake of others. The last poem “Backboard Boxer” is an ekphrastic poem and does not use the theme of flight, but instead the theme of fight; it is intended to teach others to stay motivated. This poem was

specifically used to teach what independence requires strong, internal will, or else a person will always be set back.

The third part, *Insomnia* illustrates the insomnia from deep thoughts, stress, and of depression. This section is more spilled thoughts than anything, making the works more straightforward or brief. These poems illustrate how heavy thoughts can consume a person, making it almost hard to talk about, hence the lack of illustration compared to the others. It is noted that there is a slight theme of desire for death in these poems. I considered censoring these poems, but I feel that it is important for the audience to know that these feelings are real, harsh, and sometimes hidden in several of those around us everyday. “Trust as a Feather” is a poem that shows the struggle of feeling incapable due to a lack of confidence. “Second-to-Last-Cigarette” was inspired by my friend, Kiet Chung, and is a persona poem that consists of five lines per stanza and rhyme. This is a feature I wanted to include in this specific poem because it shows how something as harmful as cigarettes is used as a coping mechanism to stay rationalized and organized while in stress. “Somber Evenings” is an ekphrastic poem made by two combined, untraditional haikus to portray the painter, Vincent Van Gogh in his last few days before his suicide because while he is appreciated for his artwork today, some do not know how much he was suffering. Furthermore, a cry for help is often silent. The last poem, “Drowning Myself” has lines formatted to illustrate the constant fluctuations of thought as one is struggling internally; also, this poem is a reminder to my audience to reach out to others who need help, because they can still be saved. I ended this section with this poem to remind readers that death is not the answer.

The final part *Goodnight./Goodnight!* is the longest in my thesis, consisting of love poems. The title of this section mimics a text message conversation between two lovers. It is assumed that when one blatantly says goodnight, and uses a period right after, it means that the person may be mad or passive. On the other hand the exclamation point on the other

goodnight refers to a happy end of conversation between two lovers. In my personal experiences in life, love has not always been kind to me, so this section shows that there are different spectrums of love: the bad, the good, what *is not* love, and what *is* love. These poems transition from desire, heartbreak, doubt, then hope. “Jhoota Tay Mera Pyar” (“The Liar Was My Lover”) was a translation poem based on an Urdu poem that I found unaccredited online, which is very unfortunate. However, it represents unrequited love leading to confidence. “The Kiss on VJ Day” is a persona poem from the perspective of Greta Zimmer Friedman to raise awareness about the sexual harassment masked by a seemingly romantic picture of a kiss. After the end of World War II, an iconic photo of a soldier kissing a nurse was captured in September 2nd, 1945 by Alfred Eisenstaedt; however, several years after the photo was taken, the nurse in the photo was identified, who recalled the kiss being forced: “He was kissing me.” This poem is broken in two parts to portray how abruptly the nurse’s celebration turned away. This poem was written to show that we should not celebrate such harassment. This section then transitions into loneliness and desire. “Break-up Baggage” is one of my favorite poems because it was written raw from a broken heart, reflecting on my past lovers. This poem illustrates a young, broken heart yearning to rekindle love. Meanwhile, “Wolf’s Howl” is an ekphrastic poem inspired from a sculpture in the New Orleans Museum of Art’s sculpture garden. It is a reflection of the anger and envy one feels after a breakup, but also the sliver of hope that everything will be okay again. Then, “Forecast” is about the doubt and uncertainty one feels about rekindling said love, and whether she has the desire to truly put her heart through a minefield of emotions. Finally the last two poems are more lyrical and illustrative, capturing the hope in finding love that will truly stay, as well as the happiness one feels when being complete. The last two poems were inspired by my fiancé, who has taught me to look in more positive directions in life, as well as looking to love myself. I wanted this collection to end on a positive note, to teach my

audience that life is a very long journey, and with patience and lessons to bear, things will be better.

Poetry has given me an outlet to really understand myself and who I am. This reflection is only a glimpse into the potential emotions anyone can undergo. Enlightenment and understanding are the most important things for a person to grow. With this, I hope to further improve my writing, and try to balance it with whatever new journey life plans to take me in.

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Notes

Biography

I want to tell you the New Year

I had never had before

I had never had before

I had never had before

I had never had before

I had never had before

I had never had before

I. Jetlag

I had never had before

I had never had before

I had never had before

I had never had before

I had never had before

I had never had before

I had never had before

I had never had before

I had never had before

I had never had before

I had never had before

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I had never had before

I had never had before

I had never had before

I had never had before

I had never had before

Thanksgiving for the New Age

Lord, bless the food on the table,
 Roasted turkey with stuffing
 And baked ham—
But worry not, for one Muslim on the table (AKA me),
 Readymade cornbread.

How patient we are, with our mouth watering
As we gawk at the buffet on the table,
And with our phones out, ready to show
 On the only group photo we took this year,
 But it's okay, because it has the *perfect* caption.

How we wait for your grace,
So we can stuff our faces
With the thoughts we dare not share
About who won the presidential race.

And bless us, the peasants, who are suffering—
 The girls who do not have the new makeup palette,
 The boys who cannot sleep with just one girl,
 The parents who believe everything on Facebook,
 And the rest of us who believe our opinion matters.
Forgive us, for it is in our nature to sin.

Lord, give us ignorance, and help us feed our cattle;
 Consumerism will not feed itself—
Fidel Castro is dead,
 But capitalism is as alive as the “holiday season”,
 And we will all be zombies working overtime
 To catch the “lowest sale of the season”
 While we sip from our venti macchiato from Starbucks.

We are thankful, Lord, for all you gave us today,
So we return to you:
 Gluttony
 Greed
 Pride
 Lust
 Envy
 Wrath
 Sloth

In the most creative ways imaginable
For the next 364 days of the year we forget you
Before the next Thanksgiving
Amen.

I Have not Been to This Park in Years

I lie down, next to my worn-out sneakers
Letting the dew of the uncut grass kiss my blistered feet.
Silence, golden as the absent summer sun, cannot match
How the air hums tunes of nostalgia,
Melodies where the dragonflies reign the primrose skies with their *Terpsichore*,
Are interrupted only by the currents hitting the cracked boulders of the lake.
The soft breeze leaves goosebumps on my skin.

The air is musky from leftover beer cans and paint fumes,
Probably from the same ironic hipsters who scrawled on the bench:
“NOTHING LASTS FOREVER.”
The bench itself looks like it has been there forever;
It is accompanied by a woman in her thirties:
With a tan, wrinkled skin hugging her neon shorts and tank top,
With a cigarette in her mouth, and with squinting eyes on her cracked *iPhone*,
As she pays no attention to her child falling off the monkey bars yet again.

The sun bids adieu with the sounds of the grasshoppers chirping.
I rise, with static jolts on my feet, and grass burrs scattered throughout my hair,
To watch as the cerulean lake ripple farther than my eyes can see, then
Eventually merge with the languid, amber clouds.
I wonder whether this park has always been this lovely,
And if the people are the only ones polluting it.

Beggars of Karachi

Tap. Tap.

The driver of our clunker-Suzuki,
Told me to ignore it,
But I could feel the greased fingers smudging
On the window to my right,
And my eyes wander without will.

Chills like the air condition blew on me.
Both girls were little daughters like me,
But their sweat swiftly spouted from
The unwanted kisses from the sun.
Their dark eyes were empty from haplessness,
Reflected only my shame, as I watched them
Like animals at the zoo through a glass.
I could not help but watch.

I observed their unkempt hair slicked with *amla oil*
Spread across their stained kurtas,
Washed only with pitied eyes of others.
I then saw the orange and green glass bangles,
Jangling across their tawny arms.
Our worlds touched with our fingertips as I handed them
Fifty rupees and my leftover fries.
They shone, praising Allah with my kindness.

As we drove forward,
The driver chuckled,
Saying that I was a naive girl
And not to bear tears,
Because they were “professional” beggars,
And I will not end their misfortunes.

The Treasure of Love

A palm reader once told my grandfather
That he will be rich before his death,
So he spent his whole life purchasing lotto tickets
Along with the cigarettes he bought
At the corner store across from his one-story flat.
He hid them from my grandmother,
Whose wealth was defined through the hand-made bread
And the calloused hands that made them.

In 1960, he found his fortune,
Carried it around in his seamless, torn wallet:
A black and white photograph,
With its corners crumbled from *ghee*.

The little girl made the photo vibrant.
She was the first child, the first
Of three brothers and a sister,
Holding onto a wooden, rocking horse—
The only luxury of her childhood.
She was not a pretty child.
Her face was round, her cheeks were bloated,
And she wore an apathetic smile.
Her eyes were dark and held confidence.
The only thing darker was her hair
Peeking though a garland of jasmines
Sold for loose change
By the homeless kids on the streets of Karachi,
Which was the only crown
Her father could afford to buy for her.

The childhood she knew of was learning
How to make *masala*
To mask the stale taste of aged lentils,
And how to put a needle through a thread
To make clothes for her younger siblings,
Instead of playing cricket until sunset,
And learning mathematics from her younger brother
Who was allowed to attend the school down their block.

She was an obedient child, and she did no wrong
Besides secretly stealing almonds
While her mother would make rice-pudding.
She became an obedient woman,
Listening to the will of her parents

Because her heart knew no objection
For her parents chose the best for her.

At the age of seventeen;
The garlands of roses and jasmines
Veiled in front of her face
Could not hide the pride in her smile,
Despite marrying a man of a lower class
Because her father could not afford
A better dowry for her.

The only other time she smiled like that,
Was when she rushed through the rusted gates,
With tears that traveled down her face
To tell her ill father, that her husband was
Going to medical school in “Ahmericah,”
And she would bring her family to
Their foreign fantasy one day,
Where they will eat almonds and cashews everyday.

It wasn't until my grandfather's deathbed,
Where he realized the palm reader
Proposed more than false gold,
For it was not the greencard, passport,
Or change in his daughter's coin purse
From the United States of America
That was his fortune—
Rather, it was his daughter's love
That made him rich.

I Long for Home

I treaded through waters
On a small boat
With several families.
Those nights were the coldest,
So I huddled with the other teenage girls
Because we did not know
What else we could do for warmth.

However, the elders assured me
That the very home I have grown with,
My beloved Syria,
Now appeared dangerous,
As if it were the mouth of a shark.

I ran towards the border
With chafed feet,
Barely catching up to
My family, as they shielded
My eyes and shrouded doubt
That I would be safe once again.
But truth is, I did not even know
Where "U.K." was on a map.

I arrived to
"Freedom grounds,"
Or rather,
Foreign grounds,
Fretful grounds—
Or even,
Facinorous grounds.

All the people here know
Are what the media show:
The bombs blitzing
Our grounds and
Our children crying
With blood spewed
All across their faces.

They do not know about
The honeyed dates
My grandmother would make
Or about the sweet mangos
And sugared lemons
Merchants would sell
On their wooden wagons.

What the people here let me know
Was I was not like the others here.
The dirty glares on the streets
Were easier to understand
Than the trail of ignorant insults I could not understand.
I do not know why they say I am from "Bin Laden Land."

My family brought me to
The United Kingdom
To forget who I was
And to run away
In the rabid havoc,
Wishing I would forget home.

I believe one day,
I am to return home—
A fragmented false hope
To replace the regret I have
For not looking back one last time
Before I left home.

Night Terrors

I woke up to the cooing
Of a warm voice,
That reminded me
Of my mother
And felt a chilliness
Of a hand on my
Feverish forehead. So cold.

I imagined I was twelve,
Holding my mother's hand
Late night at the bus stop
Under the unlit lamp-pole,
As she said goodbye
To one of her many boyfriends.

But this one,
He was very large,
With putrid breath
Masked by Tic-Tacs
And a toothless smile.

He had hungry eyes
Wanting to feast
On young skin,
And I had eyes
Wanting to tear
Away from his gaze.

Mother told me she loved me
Before she took me to his Escalade.
Young girls, *Snow Whites* like me,
Sell better in the market,
And I wanted to give her a break,
To show I loved her too.

There is one part I could not forget:
How his hands were so cold
As they traveled all over me,
And how I tuned them out
Imagining my mother's warm voice
Telling me she loved me.

Mid-day Serenade

That olive man with the ugly, bovine face
Walked past those old, lively trees
And sought no shame or disrespect, scraping his filthy moccasins
Across the feeble tissues of fallen leaves.

He was queer like naked branches in a verdant forest—
Yet, I was still curious, desiring to scale him like those trees,
As I listened to him hum a melody of my memories that
My mother used to sing me to sleep with.

I thought of the petunias she held
On her breast pocket that Sunday afternoon,
Where the air was filled with the scent of the lemon pies
She made me for my thirteenth birthday.

While his axe pounded over and over
The same sapling I planted at her tombstone—
With no witness, I was blind and deaf from his hymn—
Because I spoke to Mother once again, thanks to him.

II. Lullaby

Look Up and Fly.

after Kara Walker's *Untitled* (Birds)

Songbird, waiting with me,
I hope you don't clip your own wings
On purpose for my sake, and
Force yourself to stay here.

You must be selfish,
Because if I had the chance,
The moment I gain flight
I'd Fly,

Fly,

Fly

Away from the cage we call home,
Even if would mean I must leave without you.

O My Dear Sparrow

I desire
For you to see skies
Through the dull
Monochrome photos
In my gallery,
Where life is phased
With immersed beauty,
So vibrant.

I did not mean to
Bash your wings
Or cover your eyes.

I did not want you
To know flight
Or see sights.
I wanted
To make grounds
Less apathetic
So you could
Stay safe here.

Instead, your
Curiosity
Searches skies
Through restive hours
To fly in
Aimlessly wandering
All across
The russet sunsets.

If that is
What you want,
Then I warn you,
My darling caged bird.
You are free to fly
To dangerous heights
On doomed feet
To explore the clouds,
And learn life
Was only divine
In portraits.

Fragile

Oh, Dear butterfly,
Who soars the sky
Ever so vivaciously,
Why are your wings
Frail to the touch?

You are marked
With such nectar
Scattering a scent
Ever so sweet,
Which trails behind
Each flutter of
Those fragile wings.

The flight of beauty
Comes from you,
Oh, Dear butterfly
And brings delight
To those in sight.

I desire greatly
To hold you
Just one time
And fly with you,
Though it seems
That is improbable—
For I may pare you
Of your beauty,
Accidently ripping
Your delicate wings
For the sake
Of my selfishness.

The Goat Herder in Front of the Campagna di Roma
after *Campagna Di Roma* by Thomas Cole (1832)

The mighty tower
Watches me with
His eye of God,
As I harvest his
Goats and estate
All by myself.

When the winds
Are silent and the
Cumulus clouds
Stand still in fear,
Nature listens alongside me,
As the tower shares with me
His divine wisdom:

I am a slave
To his eyes
And the rich
Who own me.

I am nothing less
Than mere goats,
Verdant grass,
Or azure skies
Painted into this world.

I am smaller
Than the vast
Lands, rustling
Winds, and warm
Sunsets near me.

This whole world
Is a miracle itself,
And although I am
Minute in his eyes,
I am a miracle too.

Backboard Boxer

after Thomas Eakins' *Between Rounds* (1898)

The crowd's noise is
A muffled mosquito
Flying by my eardrums,

And my temple pulsates
Faster than the panting
Of my breath.

My hands hold
The coiled plastic rope,
Keeping me slouched.

The grand, roped ring,
Collects the sweat
Falling from my scalp.

Coach's criticism is
Worse than an
Unexpected uppercut.

As my feet beat
Against the mat,
I crack my knuckles.

Vertigo begins:
My numb nose
Cannot sniff pain.

My body is torn,
For I am
A weak-willed warrior.

But nothing is worse
Than a permanent bruise
To my masculinity,

So I lace my gloves;
When the bell rings,
I will be victorious.

III. Insomnia

The Second-to-Last Cigarette

My fingers reach for a cigarette from the coffee table,
And while both of my lungs are crowded by nicotine,
The scorched smoke shuttles between my lips and the room's gable,
Then back to my lungs to plead to the cancer to reconsider my guillotine—
A conviction I've already consented to.

Meanwhile, the lighter, the midnight survivor.
It witnesses wane hours of my mornings smelling of death,
And keeps me occupied to avoid talking to the taxi driver
During the night rides home alone, because of my unkissable breath.
The lighter is my only companion.

Alas, I know my addiction will kill me,
And my body will find its way to my ashtray, too,
Which sometimes make me want to quit cold-turkey,
And reinvent my life into something brand new.
My future is a haze.

I may be down to the last one in the pack,
But I cannot appeal to my cringing needs to feel
Until my stress stops these eternal, pulsating panic attacks
Because the thought of being a stable, social citizen is surreal.
So, I smoke because this society will kill me before another cigarette will.

Trust as a Feather

I felt the weight of the world
Fall upon my shoulders
When you asked if you could
Trust me with your life.

The seas in your eye
Were not a riptide
I could bear inside,
Knowing they might die.

You are frail as a feather,
And knowing I can pluck you
Gives me a temptation of power,
And fear of abusing it.

Somber Evenings

after *Vincent's Chair with His Pipe* by Vincent Van Gogh (1888)

My mind daubs bitter
Thoughts once again, as I am
Hunched on this dull chair.

The pipe's wisp of grey
Is my woman of choice; she
Brings warmth on cold nights.

Drowning Myself

I'm submerged
In heavy thoughts
Anchoring me down;
I fear swimming in water,
But I cannot help but to jump
Further into deep ends, even though
I feel that there is no one to save me if I drown.

However, in the distance, I hear your faint voice,
Your stream of words rushing swiftly,
Breaching against my currents,
Begging me to stay afloat,
And bringing me air
Back to my lungs
Just to save me.

**IV. Goodnight.
Goodnight!**

Jhoota Tay Mera Pyar (The Liar Was My Lover)

More or less I've been in denial,
Trusting this illusion of love.

Despite giving her my heart,
She was still unfaithful.

Now, even when a woman
Falls in love with me,

I cannot help, but believe
She has wasted her time.

Susceptibility

The peacock waves
Past me;
His feathers
Caress me
With the gentleness
He promises.
Although,
It seems that
His vivacious colors
Remind me of memories
Only seen
Through wistful hues of gray
As those around
Only wish to pluck
His feathers.

The Kiss on VJ Day

after Alfred Eisenstaedt's *VJ Day in Time's Square* (1945)

I was in awe with the other nurses.
I felt like time was floating,
Slowing down the sea of people and
Parading the streets.
President Truman's voice echoed
From the strangers around:

“The war has ended! “

“Japan has surrendered!”

“God bless America!”

My stark white uniform
Had been tainted from war.
I felt the tears of joy in my eyes
Falling into my aching hands.
I never thought this day would come:

Red, white, and blue confetti kissed the clouds.

Nurses and sailors praised God.

Young and old ladies squealed in joy.

Military men kneeled to the ground in tears

Children with their cardboard signs in celebration too.

There were smiles for the Americans.

And victory for the Americans.

The nation was alive again.

The war was over.

I felt free.

Lust was in the air,
Crowds of people were everywhere,
But I was only lost within Times Square.

Sailors and army men
Tore through the crowd,
Celebrating by
Kissing women—
 Left,
 And right;
 Old,
 And young.

I briefly saw him,
A young sailor,
Whose dark uniform
Matched his
Dreamy eyes.
A chiseled, pointed nose,
And a smile
Approached me.

Suddenly,
His arm curled
Around my neck,
And his other arm
Pushed onto my back.
My head tilted backwards
And my breast pressed to his chest.
I lost my balance, but he held me effortlessly.

I was submissive to his kiss:
 His warm lips fell onto mine,
 And a symphony of static
 Jolted down my spine.
 The stubble of his chin
 Chafed against my skin,
 And the musk of his cologne,
 Was strong, making my head spin.

A nearby camera shuttered,
Catching the scene:
Perfect, plastic love.

Break-up Baggage

Beyond the vanity mirror
I slide a creamy, crimson color
Across my parting lips,
For all of the empty kisses tonight—
With my only company being
The smears of the black mascara
On my *CoverGirl* mask.

Nostalgia gnaws at me
As I try to remember your voice,
 (But it is only static in my head)
Try to imagine your warmth,
 (But there is no fireplace like you)
Or try to remember my innocence,
 (But I do not remember life without you).

I find myself picking up fragments,
Recreating a mosaic of these memories
By looking for you in
 Other homes,
 And beds of,
 Other men,
But these are only pigments painted
By desperation
In hopes of finding you again.

I can't help but imagine
If I was not
 Pretty enough
 Smart enough
 Happy enough
 Or fun enough
For you to truly love me.
If anything,
I was naive with lust,
While you were a puppeteer of my heart.

I am not sure
If I will find someone else,
But I only hope
My old, forgotten bobby pins
That you may find lying
On your bedroom floor,
Make nostalgia gnaw at you too.

Wolf's Howl

after Beta Sasik's *Dreamscape* (2016)

My bitter solitude
Enviest the craters of the moon;

While they, too, feel alone,
At least you are always watching them,
Since they give you more light
In the darkest of your nights
More than I ever could.

I could only hope, the sun
Can give warmth like you.

Forecast

Guilt and forgiveness
Fill water into my lungs,
Until the incalcescence of
Your voice evaporates
The somber storms inside me.

The weather is nice today,
But I can't promise
Things will always be this way.
The shards of our broken hearts
May finally be glued again—
But the cracks remain:
Bringing in humid skies,
Thick fogs, and midnight hail.

I hope you can see
That I love you so dearly,
But there are flaws in me
Where I cannot love you freely—
It will depend on the forecast.

Rithubhedam (Change in seasons)

Despite seeing the frost
Of my breath
In the February air,
And the snow
Peeking into my boots,

There was summer
In your smile
That had unraveled
My petals
And made me bloom.

Kaleidoscope

I'm trapped in the walls of a kaleidoscope.
I see you mirrored everywhere,
How you're frozen onto the stars in the skies,
How you rush against the ocean's current,
And how you linger along each footstep I take.
My curiosity has only led me to straining eyes,
But I'm scared to look away,

Scared to imagine what a world would look like, or
How bleak it must be to live without the world you've shown me.

Notes:

Thanksgiving for the New Age

Fidel Castro (page 13): a Cuban revolutionary and politician who governed the Republic of Cuba as Prime Minister from 1959 to 1976, then as President from 1976 to 2008. He also started the first communist state of the Western Hemisphere and aided the start of the Cold War. He died November 25th, 2016.

I Have not Been to this Park in Years

Terpsichore (page 14): Greek word for "delight in dancing" derived from the nine Muses and goddess of dance and chorus.

Beggars of Karachi

Amla oil (page 15): Oil derived from the fruit, amla. It is commonly used by Southeast Asians as a cheap, effective leave-in hair mask to encourage hair growth. It also tends to make the hair greasy; it has a pungent smell.

Kurtas (page 15): A long, loose, and collarless shirt traditionally worn by Southeast Asians, such as Pakistanis and Indians.

The Treasure of Love:

One-story flat (page 16): a one-story, stone-walled apartment. It consists of one big room and a small bathroom. There is usually minimal to no furniture.

Ghee (page 16): clarified butter made from buffalo milk used in Pakistani and Indian cooking; often fattening and unhealthy.

Henna (page 16): An orange-brown dye derived from a henna plant. When extracted, it is put into a piping cone with a tiny whole, so that designs can be made as the user applies pressure onto the cone. After the ink dries, it dyes the hand with color. It is traditionally worn for special occasions.

Masala (page 16): Southeastern spices ground into powder or made into paste to add to cooking.

Attend the school down their block (page 16): In some poorer families, girls are not sent into school in favor of the boys in the household; in turn, the girls are taught household chores and cooking.

Dowry (page 17): money, items, or property purchased to give to the groom and his family in turn of the daughter's hand in marriage. Often times, parents spend years saving up and arranging a dowry for their daughter because the dowry and goods are a reflection of how high their status is, or how valuable their daughter is. A promise of a good dowry is usually sufficient to gain good proposals.

Almonds and cashews (page 17): A luxury, since they are very expensive in Pakistan; nuts are only bought by the elite, high class, or for a special occasion.

I Long for Home

Syrian Refugees (page 18): citizens of the Syrian Arab Republic who were forced to leave their home due to the Syrian war in 2011. Refugees seek to find safety and asylum wherever they are.

Bin Laden Land (page 19): a derogatory, ignorant, and racist assumption that anyone who is Middle Eastern is related to terrorist groups.

Night Terrors

Snow Whites (page 20): In terms of child prostitution and trafficking, young girls are described as Disney princesses for potential buyers to visualize characteristics such as hair color.

The Goat Herder in front of Campagna di Roma

Campagna di Roma (page 26): A lowland plain that surrounds the city of Rome in the Lazio region in central Italy.

Jhoota Tay Mera Pyar

Jhoota Tay Mera Pyar (page 34): Urdu phrase that translates to: “the liar was my lover” or “my lover was a lie.”

The Kiss on VJ Day.

VJ Day (page 36): September 2, 1945. It was the day it was announced that Imperial Japan had surrendered World War II.

Break-up Baggage

Cover Girl (page 38): A common and popular makeup brand. Their campaign often uses models wearing their makeup.

Bobby pins (page 38): a soft implication of a girl living in a house, because girls have a tendency to leave hair pins unnoticed because they are so invaluable and fall off easily.

Wolf's howl

Wolf's Howl (page 39): Wolves have a tendency to howl when there is a full moon out.

Forecast

Incalescence (page 40): A growing warmth or ardent; used in context to explain the heat of strong emotions.

Rithubhedam

Rithubhedam (page 41): Hindu word for the changing of seasons.

Biography

Anam Ismail is a Biology major (as well as a Creative Writing and Art minor) at Xavier University of Louisiana. She has won the Truman Capote Scholarship for the 2015-2016 school year, as well as the 2016-2017 school year; not only this, but she has been published in Xavier University of Louisiana's literary journal, *New Voices*. She was born in America, but was raised with Pakistani parents, allowing her to remain traditional and hold her cultural stands along with her American upbringing. She hopes to go into school to become a Physician's Assistant, as well as eventually go to graduate school for creative writing. She hopes to always be able to write.