



# AFTAB

FALL 2012

Islamic Center of New York University

# AFTAB: Rays of Light

The Islamic Center at New York University's publication which serves as an outlet for creative writing, poetry, art, and other articles. This is a publication through which members of the New York University community can exchange ideas, share their literary and artistic talents, and communicate on the topic of Islam as well as the broad range of issues facing the Muslim community.



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# AFTAB: RAYS OF LIGHT

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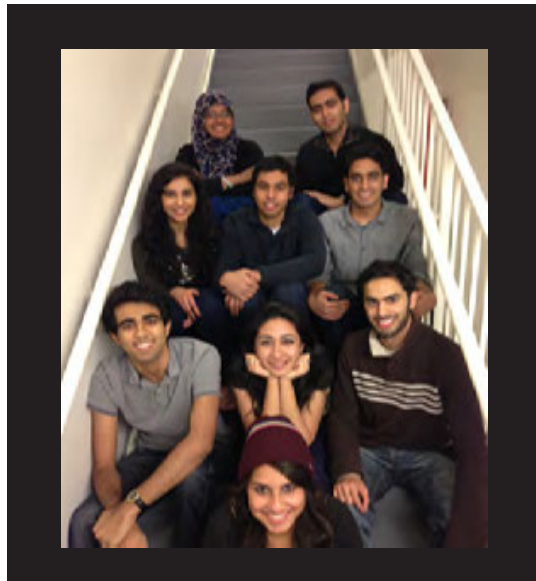
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## AFTAB: RAYS OF LIGHT



UMMAH OF ONE TAZMIN UDDIN & ZEINA SMITH	6
SANDY  Mahin Shamsi	8
DOES SHE EVEN HAVE EARS?  SHANJIDA CHOWDHURY	10
I WAS ONCE A BOY  GARETH BRYANT	14
I AM NOW A MAN  GARETH BRYANT	15
JAZZY NIGHT  Chad Hladki	16
TODAY  Chad Hladki	16
ISOLATION  Omar Khan	19
MVUA  RUANN IBRAHIM	21
FRAGMENTS OF A SUMMER LOVE  OMAR KHAN	22
ANOTHER HAPPY ENDING FOR THE LOVED ONES  ANONYMOUS	24
TINTED LENSES  ROHUL AMIN	26
MIRACLE WORKER  YUMNA PATEL	28
RUNNING ON TIME  IRAM SHEZADI ALI	30
THE PEN IS MIGHTIER THAN THE SWORD  ZUHA JAMIL	32
A MOTHER  RANIA MUSTAFA	34



Thank you to all the contributors.



FATIMA KAMRAN

# UMMAH OF ONE

TAZMIN H. UDDIN & ZEINA SMITH

DAYS FOR US ARE ALL THE SAME  
WE NEVER THINK FROM WHERE WE CAME  
NEVER THINK ABOUT REALITIES BEYOND WHAT WE SEE  
LIVING IN A BUBBLE WHERE ALL WE THINK OF IS "ME"

WHEN AN UMMAH OF ONE, TRULY DID EXIST  
NOW ALL THESE DIVISIONS, IT DOES CONSIST  
WE INSIST ON FOLLOWING THE PROPHETIC WAY  
AND YET WE CONSIDER IT A BURDEN TO DO AS HE SAYS

OUR HEARTS OF METAL ARE SO HARD TO MELT  
IF ONLY WE COULD FEEL THE EMOTIONS THE PROPHET  
FELT  
THE PRAYERS MADE FOR OUR WORLD  
ONE IN WHICH TRUTH IS UNFURLED

LIVING IN A HAZE  
WE MAKE PRAYERS FOR BRIGHTER DAYS  
WHEN THERE'S NO GUILT BY ASSOCIATION  
WHEN OUR LEADERS ARE NOT THE DEFINITION OF  
CORRUPTION

WHEN OUR YOUNG CAN GROW AND LEAD  
WHEN OUR BRETHREN AREN'T BEING GUNNED DOWN  
IN THE STREETS  
THEIR ONLY CRIME IS TO RESIST THE OPPRESSION  
"IS THAT SO WRONG?" IS THE QUESTION

WHERE ARE WE? WON'T WE ANSWER THEIR CALL?  
WHO ARE WE TO LET THE INNOCENT FALL?  
WON'T WE BE THEIR SPARK OF HOPE?  
WON'T WE HELP THEM COPE?

NIGHT AFTER NIGHT OUR PEOPLE FALL  
AND NIGHT AFTER NIGHT ANGELS AWAIT OUR CALL  
WAITING FOR US TO RISE IN PRAYER  
FOR THEY GO BEYOND BORDERS



OMAR KHAN

Sandy... oh Sandy. I never took you seriously. So maybe it is my fault. Maybe I should've listened to everyone warn me about you. Maybe I should've stayed in New Jersey. Biding my time and waiting it out. But no, I had to see myself. I had to face your wrath alone, because you know, that is what being independent is about.

Oh but they warned me, of your fury. And I laughed. I laughed with my friends as I waited for you to come. I laughed at the little stirs you created that silent Sunday night. I disturbed the calm before the storm. Little did I know you were just taking your time, preparing for your attack - creeping in stealthily as we sat drinking our chai.

Then the scarves began to fly, the leaves began to swirl, the chill began to settle. And in the dark of the night, the wind, it started to howl.

I peeped out through the blinds, saw nothing but rain, and slid back under my covers. I was undeterred. Just a little wind, just a little rain, nothing new. My only complaint was being told to stay inside. But the world was at my disposal even inside my cage. I snickered. I was still winning Sandy.

Slowly, you started to cut me off. I must say, you worked strategically. You took away one portal at a time. Like cutting of limbs, one at a time, watching me writhe. But I stayed strong. Stiffened my upper lip, told

everyone I could do this and strengthened up my base camp with rebel soldiers. Oh and let us not forget the victims of circumstance. They were easy prey, those wanderers with nowhere to go, nowhere to hide from you. I shamelessly took advantage of them.

They warned us you would go after the power. You knew how important that was to us. We were prepared. Or so we thought. Even then we realized it wasn't an absolute necessity. You made us stronger. Showed us we could spend the night without power. So you went after something a little more personal, our water. The irony, the rain causes the water to stop running. And in your final act, you snatched away the most important thing we had; communication.

Then things got frantic. No electronic communication. Were we really expected to physically reach out to our people? How? We are the generation that saw technology grow exponentially as we grew up. We learned the ways of the new world, and ignored the ways our parents spoke of. But you know what Sandy? I made it through that too. When I was almost in tears, my people were there for me. Together we promised we would not let you come between us. And among us was a great man, a man who picked me up when I was on my knees because of you. A man who offered us food, shelter and warmth, and told us he was still fighting on our side. He rekindled our faith.



Reminded us God was always there for us. And that God was going to be there every step of the way if we only called upon him. And God would take us home.

But not before we all had a little fun and mocked your wrath a little more. With our renewed resilience, we walked out in the post-apocalyptic New York. I saw sights I had only ever seen in movies. The sights I hope no one ever has to see, but I keep sacred because I might never see them again. We walked through the darkness and towards the light. I was a little smug walking into the light, knowing that people on that side wouldn't have the stories I did. The stories of a bittersweet victory, the realization of a love that hurt me, a sense of belonging that came with that hurt, because that place you tore up? That place is my home now.

The next morning, the great man I spoke of earlier went out of his way to take us to safety. For some it was home, for me it was family. And while it was warm and safe and comfortable, I left a part of my heart in New York. I yearned for normalcy returned quickly. As I watched from the other side, I saw the city come back to life in leaps and bounds. I felt like a coward, and wished I could be there rebuilding my home. Sandy, you taught me so much. I won't thank you, but I won't forget you either. And I will tell people about you. But I will tell them about how the people of New York braved themselves against you and came out victorious.

**MAHIN SHAMSI**

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PHOTO | Shanjida Chowdhury

## “Does she even have ears?”

Never did I imagine that I would overhear such a question being asked about me. But when I did, from three adults, I knew that naïveté does exist.

I am absolutely certain that when I started wearing the Hijab, my whole life changed. Before that, I'd wake up at the crack of dawn everyday to style my long hair to perfection. I was known by my peers for having long tresses as black as night. However during the summer of 10th grade, I had a spiritual epiphany and decided that I would give up my image as “the girl with pretty hair” to embody my faith in a more complete manner.

I've lost track of the number of people who've asked me if I was forced to “cover up”, and I've lost track of the number of times that I've replied ‘no.’ The Hijab is synonymous to oppression in the eyes of many, but I don't blame anyone for that. I understand that it's strange to see that while so many people spend hundreds of dollars on hair products to make their hair silky smooth, I spend virtually nothing (except for Johnson's Baby Shampoo) for myself!

I must admit that I was a bit scared when I first started to wear the Hijab. I was apprehensive about the reactions I'd receive, and this is because of the negativity that Muslims have faced ever since 9/11. Nevertheless, I followed through with my choice, and instead, I embraced this new part of me, a part of me that I knew I'd strive to perfect. I've discovered that in order to battle some of these ignorant notions, I needed to take the first step by staying firm in my decision.

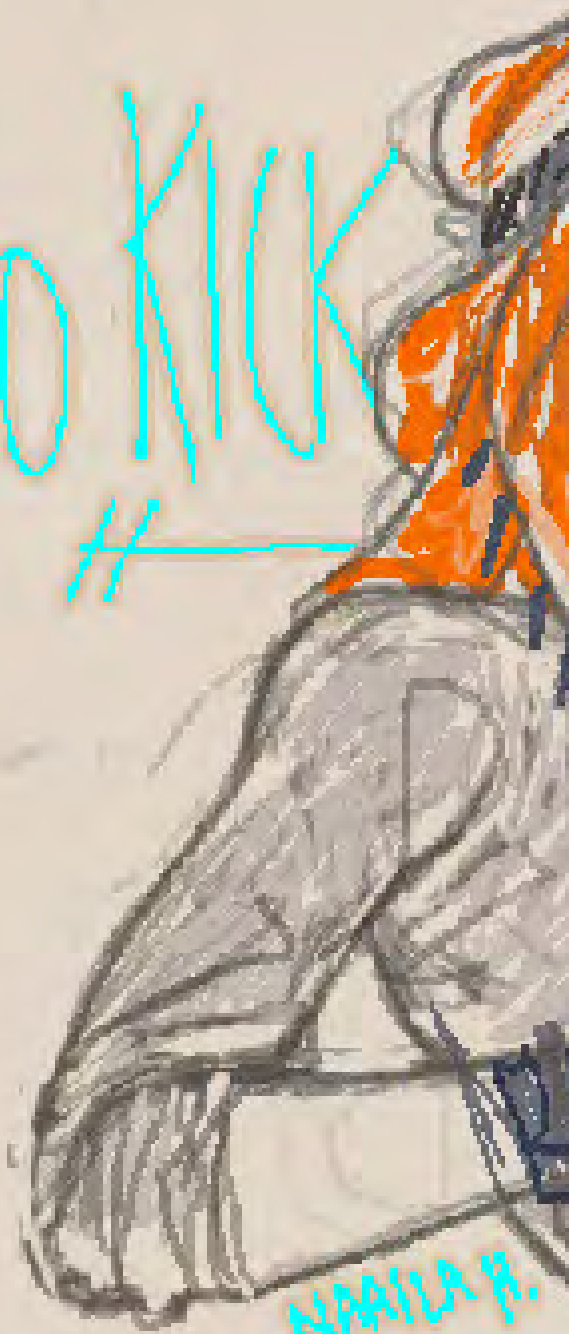
But as I've stated earlier, something was needed to halt these naïve thoughts. And thus, I decided to establish an MSA at my high school. The MSA, or the Muslim Student Association, is a club that runs nationwide. Unfortunately, it had no chapter in my high school, so I knew that creating one would help me answer the many questions that people have about Muslims. It was undoubtedly a difficult road of progression to begin such a club, being that I'm from a conservative town on Long Island, but after great perseverance, the MSA was approved by the end of my junior year of high school. The first meeting took place in September of my senior year, and the other MSA officers and I successfully explained our goals and aspiration to all 60 members, 35 of whom were non-Muslims!

As the President and founder of my high school MSA, I now am positive that people love to learn! By simply being vocal, I, along with my MSA, was able to tweak the thoughts of more than a few people! Yes, I do receive those occasional remarks on the street, but I know that as I, an NYU freshman, prepare myself for my college journey, I will loudly and proudly wear my Hijab and I will strive to educate those around me.

Oh, and for the record, I DO have ears!

SHANJIDA CHOWDHURY

READY TO KICK



NAAILA R.



NAILA HASSAN

# I was once a Boy

I used to be a boy.  
My life was a toy.

I would take things lightly, and shun responsibility, but that was clearly in the past. Pursuing the fleeting and worthless pleasures, you think you want, but that really never last.

I used to think of myself as the “ladies’ man”; I arrogantly thought that I had the world in my hand.

We are crucially warned in the Qur’an to not be like those people who tread with pride in the land.

But Allah taught me that once you depart from Him, He’ll make you lose yourself thereafter. It took a lot of pain & loss to come to realize that when things get tough, people will scatter.

Everyone who cracks a smile isn’t a friend; if a woman lets you have her, it doesn’t mean she loves you.

There’s much more to people than just a nice body or a pretty face; eventually they show their colors true.

He allowed heartbreaks & headaches to invade my personal space, to teach me that I was all wrong.

However, learning the reality of the deception of others has not weakened me; rather, it’s made me strong.

This boy whom people once knew-this quiet, simple, naive young boy has long died. My foolish mistakes and your trials & tricks have killed & buried him, his body cold.

PHOTO | Callum Voge



# I am now a Man

Today, I am now a Man.  
I have a brand new plan.

No longer will I submit to the whims of others, be deceived by the infatuation of false lovers.

Things look really good wrapped-up; but, the ugliness is revealed once you are undercovers.

People love to tag you along & play the game, to do to you what others have done to them.

They treat you like you're an enemy to them, it's like "survival of the fittest", "sink or swim".

I will not allow myself to ever love someone who neither cares nor loves me back. I must return to Allah through obeying Him and put myself back on the right track.

I've matured, and realized that not everyone is nice.

If you let them, they'll use you as their own device.

Some may call me cynical; but, I think of life literal; reality often hits you hard. People have ill will and you have to be on your toes; you always stand guard.

This is a part of "growing pains"; but, I hope to be done with injury.

With Allah as my Lord & my wits intact, I'm sure to achieve victory.

-GARETH BRYANT

## JAZZY NIGHT

As the throb of jazz progressed throughout my skull,  
I contemplated the dark sky stained by motion sensor lights,  
And I wondered,  
How this  
One solitary  
Time,  
I cared not for the siren calls of the stars,  
But rather wailed into the night,  
Owning that it was now the stars that envied me.

## CHAD HLADKI

Today,  
Well.  
Yesterday was a long day..  
I woke up with my brain sore from a restless sleep, awakening in a cold sweat.  
That was but 24 hours ago.  
Now, here I am on this darkening plain.  
Evergreens half buried in fog,  
And the first cries of the dawn begin.  
I've never seen a place like this...Remarkably ominous,  
And yet, comforting.  
The sound of spirits flying over the distant parkway.  
It is only in darkness that you can see what's most bright,  
And now I patiently count the seconds until dawn breaks the night,  
And for the newborn rays of the sun to come pouring through the horizon.  
As I look directly behind me, I'm graced by the presence of a handful of stars  
that glow brighter than any night I'd ever seen.  
I turned back around only to see a hint of red is just beginning to stain the  
western front of the sky.





PHOTO | Shanjida Chowdhury



Nadia Tayeh  
(see next page  
for description)

# Isolation

by Omar Khan

I feel

the misanthropic touch of a cold and selfish seraphim.

A drop of black ink,  
is placed in the centre of my heart, and

consumes me.

Serpent-headed shadows rise in garish plumes,  
fusing and diffusing with the toxicity of my lungs.

My insatiate vanity-grown rotting brown-  
seeks deliverance, from the soles of my feet  
to the bed of my tongue.

Murky blood drips  
from the lips of a battered face.  
The bending rapids red and permanently stained.

She makes her presence known to those in pain-  
laughing in silence,  
howling in harmony.  
This is her whorish refrain.

From time to time  
I am in chains,  
restrained by the mutual and insurmountable,  
our unchecked fits of passion and rage.

Then the plum blossoms ripen,  
and the stabbing pain recedes

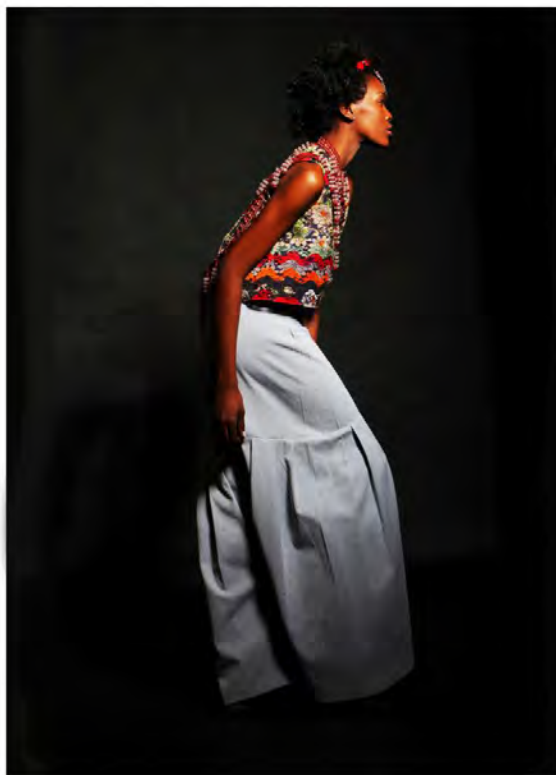
then resurfaces  
as she withdraws Até's well-worn dagger.

In a single flash,  
as the last grain trickles down the glass.  
and I see myself, swimming  
in banality, dripping with mundanity.

My skeleton all but withered,  
found in a tangled mess of seaweed  
-gray and brown.  
With my final pound of flesh,  
I pull myself deep from the trenches  
of the pier,  
while she sings,  
and I drown.

*"One would assume the psychological that may portray a person for who they are, but in a deeper sense it's the mental and emotional. Look within yourself. When the audience looks, they see the girls face (the outside) but when one looks closer, the audience sees her heart (the inside)."*

**-Nadia Tayeh**



Ruann Ibrahim  
mvua  
FW'13





This collection took root through a personal experience growing as an individual. It is a reflection of several emotions in a transformation of finding a new level of spirituality. Islam is a religion that I was born into, yet only identified with by name for the majority of my life. Throughout the senior thesis process at Parsons a quest for my Islamic identity began to reap, resulting in a new found beauty and sense of peace. I began to wear the headscarf (Hijab) in the process of the collection. The Hijab consists of carrying yourself with modesty in every aspect. In taking on the Hijab I found that modest clothing seemed to be very hard to reach in the industry. In this collection each garment does not show the shape of the body in a representation of this modesty. The collection aims to explore fashion in a modest sense contrary to much of the industry.

The title mvua comes from my name which in arabic is rooted from the word for a flowing river or raindrop. Mvua means rain in Swahili. A language spoken by much of the people in East Africa, near the land of my origin of Egypt. Mvua not only represents my name but also, the sense of spiritual renewal that I experienced throughout this process. Much of the fabric used was sourced in Egypt. Patterns display the vibrancy of the Islamic culture and history as well as the vibrancy of newfound emotions. The shapes take on an attempt to bridge the gaps between East and West as well as masculine and feminine. Using iconic pieces such as the varsity jacket, which represents a deep sense of masculinity, and instead using very feminine fabrics to substatiate the stereotype that women in Islam are oppressed. Identities such as the Niqab are also represented which consists of a complete covering of the face and body, through a simple jacket that aims to show the statement of a Niqab through western aesthetic.

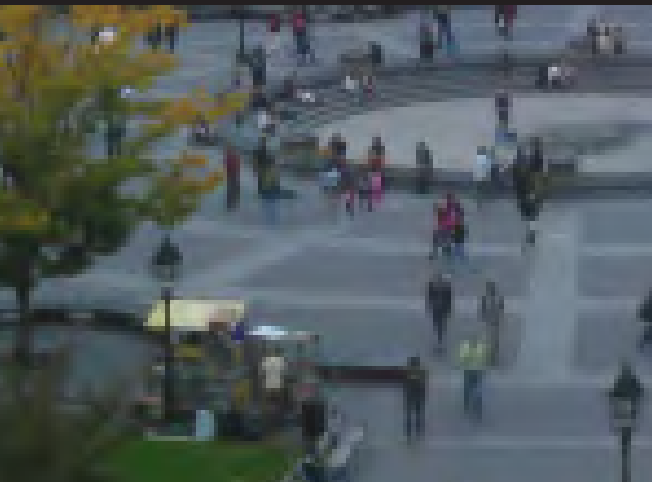


# Fragments of a Summer Love

Omar Khan

## “The Crest”

We were finding out that we both had strong feelings, and as hard as we tried to forget them in the name of our friendship, we sometimes cut into each other with the things we said. We spent a lot of time reminding ourselves that we loved each other as Love demands sacrifices, lest it in turn be sacrificed. I guess that's what relationships come down to, even when you know she is dead wrong.



## “Dehydration”

In a sense, our relationship was both cliché and extraordinary. I felt things that cannot be summarized by the mundanity of vocabulary. They were simply too intense, too vivid, too perfect for words. Our moments together may not have been vast, but perhaps that's what makes them so special. It would pain me to say goodbye to her, even if it was just for the afternoon. Parting paths with someone you care about, regardless of the span of time, slowly gnaws at a particular piece of your heart that you'd rather ignore exists in hopes retaining some minute control over your own emotions. Longing— truly and desperately missing someone you love is a




universal trial. But during the height of my foolish summer love— during those few precious moments— I felt there was nothing more serious, more dangerous, more emotionally destructive than letting go of her (for only a second) to fetch a glass of water. At times, dehydration seemed like a better alternative if it meant I could hold onto her just a little longer.



PHOTO | Zain Memon

## Another Happy Ending for the Loved Ones



the first time is in a classroom.  
i sit too far from you,  
the other side.  
you doodle on your book while the kids around you are making crude sounds,  
laughing obnoxiously.  
their eyes are not like yours. quiet.  
i think for a moment that your ears are too small,  
teeth too big,  
but your hands, just right.  
you look up, pause.  
see me watching.  
i  
can't  
look  
away.

after school we line up for the bus.  
i climb inside, eyes down,  
sit in the front, put my spiderman backpack in my lap.  
you come, sit next to me, and do the same.  
we have the same backpack.  
timid smiles are exchanged,  
it's the last time i sit by myself on that damn yellow bus.

we stay like this,  
best friends.  
i go to your house,  
you come to mine,  
talking about nothing and occupying our time with useless video games.  
the first time we kiss is after a game of Mario kart.  
i remember your bedspread,  
the rockets,  
bright blue and shooting into the sky,  
staring back at me like a promise,  
an escape.  
at this point,  
it was not love.  
that comes much later.

we hide what we are,  
steal kisses when we can,  
and hold hands only in the privacy of our rooms.  
our little secret,  
and a terrible one at that.

the worst feeling in the world,  
is to love someone,



have them love you back,  
but for it to be wrong.  
I love him.  
I loved him.  
why would God make me feel this way?  
how can this be a test?  
how do I pass?

he can feel the distance but he doesn't say anything.  
just pulls me closer to his chest,  
his breath on my neck,  
heartbeat underneath my fingertips.

i never wanted that night to end.  
i guess that's love.

the thing is,  
no one ever finds out.  
but high school ends and college separates us,  
and we don't see each other for five years.  
a family reunion is what brings us together again,  
a few moments alone in the kitchen  
means more in a motel room.  
by the time i wake up,  
you're gone.

news of your marriage doesn't surprise me. i expected it.  
you were never brave enough to love me.  
i receive the invite in the mail and burn it in the backyard.  
along with the photographs we took,  
the letters you wrote before,  
before this.

i can see you and your wife grocery shopping,  
the newlyweds looking lovely together.  
she's beautiful, of course.  
your eyes are so bright and the cigarette between my fingers gives me no comfort.  
warmth escapes me,  
and i can't bear to keep watching you and her.  
that was supposed to be us.  
you got the happy ending,  
and i got a bad habit.

you got the girl, the family,  
and i got,

i got

*-Anonymous*

# Tinted Lenses

Rohul Amin

Thunder roars, rain floods, circuits spark.  
Lights go out; the room gets dark.  
He picks up his rectangular glass device.  
Tapping away, he whimpers to society.  
And takes comfort in the outpouring of sympathy.

Her eyes open.  
She sits up in the small tent.  
The icy African night pricks her bare skin.  
Drags her from sweet fantasy.  
And envelops her in bitter reality.  
She rushes to the dying boy.  
His tiny chest moves, each breath heavy.  
She smiles, eyes sparkling, releasing tears.  
To the sky, she raises her hands.  
Thanks her Lord; her baby brother is still alive.

23 percent battery life left.  
How is he going to get through the night?  
Turn off Wi-Fi. Lower the brightness. Close all apps.  
Silent mode. No vibrations.  
His plans are in ruins.  
He walks over to the bathroom.  
No hot water. This house feels like a tomb.  
His head drops, why me? Why now?  
Her throat is dry.

But she doesn't notice.  
Her stomach is empty.  
But she doesn't dwell on it.  
She picks up the dry water bucket.  
Kisses her brother goodbye and steps out of the tent.  
The moonlight guides her in the dark.  
She prays for safety and begins to walk.

He rises and starts his morning routine.  
He craves caffeine.  
The aroma of fresh made coffee embraces his senses.  
Pour. That's enough. Get the Sugar.  
Add two spoons.  
He doesn't like it black.  
Open the refrigerator. Heart Attack.  
No milk!  
This morning cannot get any worse, he says.

She reaches home as the sun comes up.  
As she enters the tent, the child wakes up.  
She holds a clay cup of water close to him.  
He looks at it and places his lips on the rim.  
Sips the muddy brown water, as he finishes,  
A faint smile emerges.  
The sight fills her with happiness.  
This morning cannot get any better, she says.



PHOTO | Neeha Mujeeb

## MIRACLE WORKER

YUMNA PATEL

Throughout our lives, we tend to sit idly by as misfortune surrounds us, so long as we ourselves are safe and sound. Our parents work as doctors, nurses, and volunteers, saving, treating, and helping the sick every single day. It is easy to forget the reason we are here, and who put us on this Earth, when we are not the ones afflicted with pain or grief. But when tragedy strikes your own life, in an instant, the world is turned upside down, and you can't help but feel the frustration of watching others continue on with their lives, just as you were doing the day before. Words cannot describe the pain and emptiness that your heart feels when you see your younger brother-the epitome of life, happiness, kindness, and innocence-strapped to a stretcher and unable to move half of his body. To see a boy who is so attached to the Masjid, so involved in the community, so close to God, and so good to people, suddenly immobile in his legs and screaming in pain, could make even the most devout Muslim, Christian, Jew, or Hindu, turn to God, and ask, "why"? Why, just hours before was he running around playing frisbee with his friends, and now has wires, tubes, needles, and monitors attached to every inch of his body? Why does it have to be him that the doctors say is a boy who might never be able to walk again?

With each passing day in life, we manage to let this world get the best of us, and forget all the blessings that God bestows on us every day. We sit there and ask Him to bring us a sign, ignoring the plain signs right in front of us, like our two legs that keep us on our feet and moving every single day. We are always taught to have faith in God and his bigger plan for all of us. We believe that God never gives us a burden greater than we can bear. But when God tests you with your family, your youngest brother especially, it shakes your heart until you crumble. In Islam, we always believe and hear of the miracles of Allah, and the blessed month of Ramadan. I never thought that I would ever witness such a miracle in my lifetime, until this summer.

In mid August, my 15 year old brother Muhammed took a hard fall playing ultimate frisbee, from which he suffered severe spinal shock and a bruised spinal cord. He completely lost all feeling and movement in the lower half of his body. When I looked into the faces of my parents, both very religious and faithful, I saw the helplessness that they felt as doctors, when they realized science couldn't save their youngest son. It was all in God's hands.

And what great hands he was in.

When word of Muhammed's accident got out, it spread like wildfire. Our entire community in Corpus Christi came together as one to pray for its "blessed son Muhammed". Every single person, young and old, male and female, raised their hands in supplication to Allah, asking to cure Muhammed of all his ailments, and to give him back his ability to walk. All over the world, from South Africa, to Mecca and Medina, to New York and to Texas, people whose lives Muhammed had touched, and even people who didn't know him, were praying for his speedy recovery. Even after two days of no changes and watching my brother lay there helplessly, while trying to stay strong, but wondering if he would ever be able to walk, run, or play tennis again, I couldn't give up hope. Men and women spent entire nights in the masjid, standing, sitting, and lying awake praying to God with full sincerity and belief in his power. Something about the month of Ramadan seemed to increase everyone's faith and perseverance. There wasn't a moment when someone wasn't visiting him in the hospital, praying, or comforting my mother.

After almost three days in the hospital, when it seemed as though nothing was working, God gave us a miracle. Just a few hours before, Muhammed had no feeling and no ability to move his legs. By noon, he was bending his legs, and with the help of the physical therapist, he even managed to stand for a few seconds and take two steps-his first steps in days.

The doctors couldn't believe it. They said it was impossible, that he was able to begin to recover just as suddenly as he had gotten hurt. That was the moment I knew that nothing was impossible. In that moment, of sadness, happiness, fear, joy, and relief, I knew that Allah had heard us, and had answered our prayers.

Throughout our lives we sit by and watch movies and listen to stories of God's great miracles. However, most of us never have the fortune of witnessing a miracle in real life. This tragedy turned miracle has reinforced my full faith in Allah, in my religion, and in the power of prayer. It has showed me that Allah knows best, and good things can come out of the hardest of times. It is easy to turn to God when we need Him in times of hardship, and forget about Him when life is good. No matter what you are, whether you are Muslim, Jewish, or Christian, we must never take for granted all the blessings that God bestows upon us, both big and small. Always remember to thank Him every day, for the little things in life. Like the ability to stand on your own two feet.



PHOTO | Omar Khan

# RUNNING ON TIME

IRAM SHEZADI ALI

Today, I was running on time. (That could mean: 1. I was going to be on time or 2. I was literally running on time. Another reason why I love language and syntax.) In any case, I was running on time for my class. While on the train, I know I have twenty minutes to get to class and it should take me fifteen at max.

Amidst my thoughts, I decide to add in an “alhamdulillah” (praise be to God), which happens naturally at times. Then I begin to wonder whether it was really serious. Did I truly believe this was God’s doing. A part of me responds, “Sure, I could still end up being late. This train could get delayed indefinitely.” But there is this other part that is smirking in silence. I ignore what it doesn’t say.

I get off at the 58th and Lex stop to transfer over to the 6 train. As I walk up the steps to get to the 6 train platform, I notice that the train is already there. I run towards it and step inside – sigh of relief. There is an announcement: “This train is being held in the station momentarily.” I don’t mind, at least I made it.

A minute or so later, the train doors close. I’m still going to make it on time. the next stop comes. It looks a bit unfamiliar. sigh. 51st Street. One stop in the wrong direction.

I get out and walk all around the train station just to find the uptown 6. When I finally do, the timetable reads: “1. Pelham Bay Park 7mins”. The next train is seven minutes away. I walk down the platform towards the end and sit down on a bench.

The part of me that initially responded back is smiling. Of course, you were right. the only thing that comes to my mind is la hawla wa la quwatta ilah billah (There is no power except Allah).

It isn’t His weakness that my mind can not comprehend His power and greatness, but my own.

Seemingly endless journey still in progress as I continue to run on time. alhamdulillah.

# *The Pen is Mightier than the Sword*

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To a spectator watching from afar, the sight of shawl-clad girls in loosely fitted traditional Pakistani-wear quietly making their way on the granular paths of the Swat Valley in Pakistan is not uncommon. To the left and right of their path soar mountain peaks, covered from foot to summit in tall, emerald-green pine trees. It is a breathtaking vista with a heartbreaking narrative.

Swat Valley, Pakistan was under Taliban rule for 2 years, and amid the repressed lifestyle, gender discrimination, oppressive laws, and the climate of fear stoked by the extremist regime of the area, the pursuit for education, particularly for females in the region, became an alarmingly difficult endeavor. The horrors of living under Taliban rule rendered most tongue-tied for fear of inciting backlash from the radicals in control. However, amid the silence, there rose a dim but determined voice by the name of Malala Yousufzai.

Through her blog for BBC, where she wrote under her nom de plume 'Gul Makai', which means cornflower in Pashto, she chronicled life under the Taliban regime. Horrifically vivid accounts of the Taliban launching edicts that banned females from attending school, being forbidden to wear colorful clothing, being interrupted in her sleep by artillery gunfire, and living with the frightening possibility of knowing that she may not wake up the next morning brought to light the fragility of the lives of the thousands of girls who shared her living environment.

She came to public attention through this BBC blog and her advocacy of female education, eventually rising to fame upon her nomination for the International Children's Peace Prize (December 2011).

On October 8th, Taliban gunmen shot her in the head and neck during an assassination attempt on her way home from school. They hoped that her death would silence the voices of the many girls that her advocacy had raised. Today, she lies in a hospital bed in England reeling from the aftermath of the attempt on her life.

Events like these make the entire pursuit of life feel like a flimsy fabric. We all perceive ourselves as having a fort, integrity, and unity to who we are. We spend all that psychic energy knitting the world together. But there is no psychological or physical superglue that holds the pieces together. What happens when the world around us doesn't support our structure? What happens if our sense of who we are is under fire?

We succumb. We give in. We scamper to that which is easily accessible and will give us a better sense of who we are. For most of us it is the classroom- a place where thoughts are cultivated, ideas are formed, and directions are defined. But for 61 million children out there who are forced to get by without education, there are other places. There are gangs and mobs and terrorist groups; there are perpetrators of injustice and merchants of hate. And many rush to them like blindly adherent flock because they have not received an education that opens them up to a world of alternative possibilities.

Just as Swat gave birth to this valiant girl with tremendous vision, Malala, it also gave birth to a boy Anis who blew himself up at a security checkpoint at the age of 16 while conducting a terrorist attack. Malala narrates this story in her blog for BBC, highlighting how he had succumbed to the brainwashing of the merchants of hate controlling the region.





What makes children growing up in the same regional premises adopt such diametrically different ideologies, to choose paths that were the complete antithesis of each other? We have reached our saturation point and even as our limits continue to be pushed, our patience tried and tested time and time again, we simply cannot afford for more children to become prey to this extremist propaganda. The solution to ending terrorism lies not in hunting down those with guns, but in ensuring that our children realize that the pen is mightier than the sword, so they are drawn to pens rather than guns.

Yet we continue to drone on. We stubbornly cling to failed strategies. We delude ourselves into thinking that we are in the right for fear of appearing inactive on the battlefield. We succumb to meaningless rhetoric that justifies our actions. We continue to blow up innocent children in North Waziristan.

(CNN) September 25th, 2012 – “U.S. drone strikes in Pakistan have killed far more people than the United States has acknowledged, have traumatized innocent residents and largely been ineffective, according to a new study released Tuesday. The study by Stanford Law School and New York University’s School of Law calls for a re-evaluation of the practice, saying the number of “high-level” targets killed as a percentage of total casualties is extremely low -- about 2%.”

Mere condemnation of an assassination attempt at Malala’s life is lacking firsthand. Passive activism on social media sites condemning terrorism has rarely created any sustained change. If we continue to do only this, our society will conceive fewer Malalas and more lost-in-translation adolescents like Anis.

One hurricane set our entire world upside down for a week, but these people have to live with the constant fear of having a strike come down on them at any moment of the day. I argue not for the war on terrorism to come to an end, or for terrorist suspects to not be held accountable. I argue merely for us to recognize what works and what doesn’t, and to strategize accordingly. Since there are mounting reports confirming the failure of drone attacks, we need to replace this ineffective means of targeting the Taliban by more precise tools that don’t result in this many human casualties.

Often the pursuit of eliminating evil forces us to compromise on the cultivation of the good. For the flourishing of Malalas, we need the US to put its resources in finance drone strikes to better use by instead financing education in countries like Pakistan. This is because the only way to truly defeat the Taliban in the long run is to ensure that less of our children go astray and join forces with them. We have been unable to defeat them by means of violence, but if we take a stance to ensure that all of our children have easily accessible education, we will get more children to side with the mighty pen than with the bloody sword, and defeat them by virtue of superior ideologies. In the words of Frederick Douglass, “It is easier to build strong children than to repair broken men.”

ZUHA JAMIL





# A Mother

RANIA MUSTAFA

A mother, a daughter, a cousin, a niece. Each of us have several roles in our lives—at times some overtake others, some always hold priority, and some are ignored.

Today, this 6th day of Ramadan, this 6th day of August in the year of 2011- A 32 year old woman by the name of Yasmeen Ramadan had to make a decision to put one over the other.

Ramadan can be a hassle at times—always in a good way—but it can definitely get hectic. A mother never gets any breaks—always working. She walked out of her house, locking the door behind her, taking account of her children. Everyone was here. She was ready to go. She had a plan. She had to run some errands. She would be back in time for Iftar. She walked down the stairs and her feet hit the sidewalk. One. She always counted her kids before she went anywhere. Two. The little voice inside her head always made her think bad things were bound to happen. Three. They were her everything and everything should always be at arms reach. Four. Where's four?!

She had seen this scene before. In her nightmares: her son, her love, her habeebi running away from her and a car speeding towards him. She'd seen it before, she knew how it ended. She had heard his steps hitting the black cement, listened to the tires rolling over the gravel. She had closed her eyes and let out a shriek. When she'd opened them, her son was gone and the car had sped away. Forever gone. Her love, her light, her purpose of existence.

But this wasn't her nightmare, this was reality. She had control. She saw her baby in her arms. "It's a boy congratulations!" His first words. His first birthday. His first steps. His first day of school. Her baby. She screamed on the top of her lungs, hoping, wishing that that were enough. She ran.

The sound is heard. Passersbies gather around. Her son is safe. She lies on the ground covered in blood. Dead. Her Baby, her love, her purpose of existence, lives, whilst she lies in a pool of her blood as the people gather and the angel of death descends onto Getty Ave. And up her soul ascends.

One. Two. Three. Four. All safe.

I bet she was smiling. 32 year old mother: Yasmeen Ramadan. No, 32 year old warrior: Yasmeen Ramadan- She died today while saving her son.

PHOTO | FATIMA KAMRAN



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