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PHOENIX  PRO
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Prof. Vipin Kumar Aggarwal
(Principal)

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(Teacher-In-Charge)

**“ There is nothing mind
can do that cannot be
better done in the
mind's immobility and
thought-free stillness.**

**When mind is still, then
truth gets her chance to
be heard in the purity
of the silence. “**

- Sri Aurobindo

TEACHER COORDINATORS



With immense pleasure, I present a radiant constellation of words born from the minds of our exceptionally talented students. As editors, we have had the privilege of immersing ourselves in their works, and we have been utterly captivated by their boundless creativity, the diverse range of topics they explore, and the profound depth of their thought processes. From inventive poems to ingenious prose, from evaluative compositions to perspicacious reviews, each piece radiates luminance; each line scatters stardust; each word glistens, and each syllable shimmers like a star in the vast expanse of the literary cosmos. In this luminous tapestry of prose and verse, we witness the symphony of souls, each melody a testament to the infinite hues of human experience. As you turn every leaflet of this very meticulously crafted newsletter, we hope, dear reader, that you will be transported to different realms, some new and some already familiar and experienced. We invite you to embark on this odyssey of discovery, to wander amidst the enchanted groves of our students' minds.

Ms. Sukriti Sobti
Assistant Professor
Department of English



In the world of academia, where intellect meets inspiration, we are thrilled to unveil the English Department newsletter for the year 2024. This newsletter is a preview of the brilliance, innovation, and dedication of our students. The students' contributions in this are a beautiful medley of intellectual marvels, profound insights and creative fervour. The poetry woven by our students is painted with their raw emotions, intrigues and frustrations. Their words paint vivid portraits of distress, fear, anxiety, hopes, dreams, reality and fantasy, leaving an indelible mark on the reader's soul. As readers immerse themselves in the folios of our newsletter, they will encounter intriguing works ranging from trenchant critical pieces on classical works like *The Metamorphosis* as well as new trends in writing like 'Isekai' to contemplative pieces on universal themes of God, death and the meaning of life. The students' contributions reflect the hidden nuances of the written word, enriching our understanding and appreciation of the literary landscape.

Dr. Aibhi Biswas
Assistant Professor
Department of English

EDITORIAL ENSEMBLE

Art ventures the hills and graves of human landscape. It explores passion, vigour and sentimentality like the flow of a river. Unbothered and immortal like the snow-covered capes of a mountainous terrain. It lays your soul bare. Susceptible to judgment and vulnerability. So utterly human in all its forms.

This newsletter is an opportunity for all of us to take a deep dive into the ocean of our own minds. Find the scattered pieces of our experiences and truths. To be bold enough to confront the darkness and swim towards the light. A heartfelt gratitude goes to all the students who contributed to this year's newsletter and our teachers, Sukriti Ma'am and Aibhi Ma'am, for guiding us through this journey.

- **Swapnil Shashwat (3rd Year)**

Mosaics of stories, where hearts convene. A different aura, a world unseen. Shakespeare's words, Camus's theatre of the absurd. Austen's heroines, Oedipus' ruin. In Hogwarts' halls, love is found. Keats' creativity, to hope unbound. Literature is my escape, my go-to place. When the world doesn't feel alright, I pack my bags and search for the light. The light of imagination, of creativity, pouring out of breathtaking books. The magical books that forever hook. Let us cherish, with glee, the pleasure that literature brings to our eyes. For in those pages, we find different ways, leading us with the passing days. Welcome to the newest edition of our Newsletter, which will provide readers with artistic inspiration and make them dive into the world of literature. This Newsletter is the aftermath of the creative powers that the members of Phoenix Pro possess, enveloping the readers in a rich tapestry of the literary world.

- **Vania Syed (3rd Year)**



“That is part of the beauty of all literature. You discover that your longings are universal, that you’re not lonely and isolated from anyone. You belong.”

I am delighted to invite you to dive into this latest issue. We've been busy gathering pieces that inform, inspire, and ignite curiosity. Our articles delve into fascinating topics alongside lighter pieces that will spark your imagination. Our team has poured their passion into curating this issue, and we can't wait for you to experience it. So, grab a cup of tea, settle in, and prepare to be transported! Happy reading!

- **Navya Shukla (3rd Year)**



In the words of Henry Ward Beecher, “Every artist dips his brush in his own soul and paints his own nature into his pictures.” This sentiment perfectly encapsulates the essence of our annual newsletter. I am truly honoured to have had the opportunity to contribute to this collaborative endeavour, where each word serves as a brushstroke reflecting our shared experiences. My deepest gratitude extends to our team for their unwavering dedication. Together, we’ve crafted something remarkable, a testament to the power of words. May it inspire and uplift all who encounter it as we send it forth.

- **Abhigya Singh (2nd Year)**



When everything goes haywire,
When the world stops giving us heed,
We dive into the world of literature, where we find peace and solace, embracing its beauty in our own way,
Giving a new life to our vivid imagination in a parallel realm, as per our aspirations. Honoured to be a part of the Newsletter’s “editorial team” of Phoenix-Pro, I’m thrilled to present to you various kinds of artistic and literary pieces from our fellow students, who have moulded their thoughts into works and exhibits, and fulfilled our quest for literary escapades.

- **Renthunglo Jami (1st Year)**



THE DESIGNERS

“Art is the only way to run away without leaving home.” – Twyla Tharp

Thrilled to present to you the newest edition of our newsletter. I hope you find inspiration and joy as you dive into the world of artistic expression created by my peers and seniors.

I am immensely grateful to be a part of such a diligent team that has worked tirelessly to create this issue. I hope you enjoy flipping through the pages as much as I enjoyed creating them. Here’s to another edition filled with creativity and innovation!

- **Tanya Naggi (1st Year)**



A dream! What is a dream? And is not our life a dream?” -Fyodor Dostoevsky

Literature is ever-changing and ever-evolving, a dynamic concept coveted by many. Reading the works by my fellow course mates made me realise how alive literary ambition is—how many are still trying to weave their emotions into a beautiful poem. Channelling one's creativity into writing is a literal manifestation of one's thoughts and ideas. Designing the newsletter and reading all the works gave me a newfound appreciation for literature and writers. This newsletter is a journey to be cherished.

Hope you enjoy it!

- **Kaashvi Mathur (1st Year)**



ENGAGING ENDEAVOURS : DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

ODYSSEY 2023

The department organized its Annual Literary Fest- 'Odyssey' on the 12th and 13th of April 2023. The festival started with an inaugural lecture on "Caste in Indian Literature" by Prof. Raj Kumar from the Department of English, University of Delhi. Prof. Raj kumar reiterated the pervasive presence of caste in Indian society through Kalyan Rao's words from the novel Untouchable Spring: "The food one eats, the house one lives in and the clothes one wears have caste. The word one speaks have caste. Literature and culture have caste." Prof. Raj kumar, Chief Guest of the event; Prof. Vipin Kumar Aggarwal, Principal of the college; Prof. Meeta Mathur, Teacher-in-Charge, along with other faculty members also released the annual newsletter of the department, which showcased the literary and creative works of the students. The two-day literary extravaganza witnessed a range of competitions such as Mono acting, Literary Quiz, Spell bee, Literary Treasure Hunt and Bookmark Designing. An innovative addition was the Blackout Poetry Competition, where students had to redact words from a given excerpt and create their own interesting poetic pieces. Manasvi from Hansraj College won the first prize in this event. More than 20 colleges across Delhi and NCR participated in the two-day event.



STARLIGHT GALA

The department celebrated the 'Starlight Gala' on 4th May 2023 to bid farewell to the third-year students. The event featured a vibrant cultural program, including performances and activities dedicated to commemorating the journey of the graduating students. Amidst the cultural extravaganza and heartfelt performances, we celebrated their journey with flair. The gala served as a poignant moment for the department to express gratitude for the departing students' contributions while celebrating their achievements and wishing them well in their future endeavours.

- Mx. Farewell- Anurag Bhattacharya and Soniya Tiwari
- Best Dressed- Navneet Rohilla and Mahima Nayyar



TEACHERS' TAPESTRY

On September 4th, 2023, a special event called 'Teachers' Tapestry: Threads of Appreciation' was held to honour the dedication and commitment of the department's teachers. The occasion featured various entertaining performances, games, and activities tailored for the teachers, along with titles bestowed upon them to highlight their unique personalities. Dr. Rita Mehra, Associate Professor Emeritus from the Department of English, graced the event as a shining example of enduring dedication to the department.



Breaking Boundaries: Dr. Rama Yadav on the Frontiers of Modern Indian Theatre

A talk on 'Beyond the Curtain: Modern Theatre Insights' was delivered by Dr. Rama Yadav, Director of Shoonya Theatre Group and Associate Professor, Department of Hindi, Miranda House, on 15th September 2023. A Theatre veteran with decades of experience under her belt, she fearlessly confronted the norms of the heteronormative society. She adeptly highlighted the importance of Indian theatre and underscored the immense challenges inherent in pursuing it as a career path, enlightening the audience about its complexities.



THE DAWN OF A NEW ERA

On February 23rd, the Department of English recruited seven new Assistant Professors on a permanent basis. Among them were three familiar faces - Ms. Sukriti Sobti, Ms. Vibhuti Wadhawan, and Ms. Pratibha Kumari - who had previously served as ad-hoc teachers since 2015 and had enriched the department with their steadfast dedication, commitment, and perseverance. In addition, Dr. Hemchandra Nameirakpam, who served as a guest teacher, also joined the department as a permanent faculty.



The department welcomed a new chapter with the appointment of three fresh talents - Mr. Shivam Verma, Dr. Aibhi Biswas, and Ms. Pooja Pandey - bringing in youthful energy and enthusiasm. With these appointments, the Department of English now has a harmonious blend of seasoned experience and youthful vigor, which promises a vibrant future of scholarly pursuits and academic excellence.

STUDENTS ARCHIVE

Hiraeth

I open the page,
And dive into the gratifying biblichor,
To once again, sojourn in the age
When fairies, princes, knights and elves
Were the home I always turned to,
Once again, I arrived at this place,
That once provided me with solace.
I walk to the beach of the ocean blue,
The sand on my feet felt too good to be true,
And I could hear a faint humming voice
Which kept growing louder with every step I took,
I couldn't find the source, wherever I looked
The melancholic voice seemed to be coming out of a boy
Oblivious to why it reminded me of 'Helen of Troy.'
I kept following the melody,
Moving with the belief that I would soon reach my destiny,
Relishing the wind caressing my face,
I once again fell in love with this place,
Knowing that I had to go back,
To the present, from where I came
Where everything is bound to be the same,
A yearning deep within my soul
For a place that I call home
A land that makes me whole
A place that is steeped in magic,
So many events that are tragic,
Is this what they call 'Hiraeth'?
Where my longing is never complete,
My heart beats rapidly
I look for comfort, every turn, every street
I have grown used to this feeling,
In all that I say or do,
No matter what they utter,
it is a love that comes from you.

-Vania Syed (3rd Year)

Madness

Her feelings were like water cascading down a waterfall –
 pouring incessantly from her eyes.
 Like melted wax from a candle – so easily disturbed.
 Her mind was no less than the great war,
 the cries of her deliriums never leaving her alone.
 Like shards of a broken vase,
 tirelessly glued together for the tenth time.
 Such was her madness, is her madness? A truth she always denied.
 Sorrowful eyes, rage-filled heart – looking for love?
 In vain, she had tried, dismayed I watched.
 Skinning herself alive, wanting to become someone anew.
 Putting on a new skin, she desperately pretended to ensnare.
 Such was her madness, is her madness? A truth she always denied.
 The wave of realization soon struck, engulfing her in its painful recollection.
 Suffocated from her own folly, she tried to escape.
 “I’m fine!” she screamed in terror as the waves washed off her new skin.
 Skinless, she drowned.
 Such was her madness, A truth she would forever deny.

-Kaashvi Mathur (1st Year)



Do Away

Get over with it – Now!
 Before it’s “too late.”
 Why wait? For senses OR even menses
 Do away with her-
 Before she thinks
 Or do away with her when she lives
 Don’t! Don’t wait! OR it will be too late –
 O you! Who seems to care? You generous
 Who doesn’t care when she’s gone in red-
 Don’t let her rebel – for if she rebels
 She will rage! She will rage!
 Don’t let her decide.
 Or do you say it’s a choice?
 A choice? She wouldn’t know-
 Tell her- it’s her ‘big day’!
 Oh, you masked enemy, do your “good” to her
 Before you can do no more!

-Zehra Abbas (3rd Year)

Postman's Tale

I stepped into my shoes and puckered my collar.
Pushed in my jute bag and money wallet, which couldn't be any smaller.

I went outside with a monotonous mission.

My torn-out vehicle reminded me of my inferiority.

I cycled down the sunny street to pass across the school van.

A five-year-old in uniform says, "Here comes the postman!"

When I slide down to the narrow lane,

There's an old woman standing, hopeful and eager, though primarily vain.

I used to bring her son's letters as long as she was sane.

Once, he wrote, "I'll be burdened less if you just die."

And she never heard of him again.

"You are old and filthy" is a refrain to her ears.

"Don't you sympathize me"? she asked

I shrug and cycle ahead without looking at her agony and disdain.

In a vibrant-coloured kurti, the teen girl has a smile.

Long black braided hair, jangling bright bangles brushed the ankle fragile.

Pretending she doesn't care, she uplifts her eyelashes to expose her desperate eyes.

Finding her lover's note, which describes her beauty, is where her pleasure lies.

She blushes first, and then she becomes shy.

As she reads ahead, a gentle laugh just tiptoes by.

Today, a tear slid down her soft cheeks.

Because just a letter is not enough to end the promises they swore to keep.

I march towards the west of the town.

In a battered cottage resides a man who calls himself an artist and has a frown.

He never comes out to receive his piece of stamped paper

But he does secretly collect his printed rejection, sooner or later.

He believes his art will someday find its place.

With undone dishes and unpaid bills, he finds his creative space.

The dark nights are spent looking at the posters of revolutionaries and saying it's just a phase.

Bright days just pass by, believing he is the horse of a very long race.

Till the time I climb my cycle up to the posh side

I can barely paddle up and bear the ride.

I drop a paper in the pile of the umpteen unseen mails.

Realising I contribute to the mansion's ignorance, I see how my hard work fails.

Sometimes, I wash my face in the fountain water.

I, too, am like the unnoticed charity letter; in fact, no better.

The housekeeper cleans the floor I walk on once I leave.

I am a personification of the dust, I believe.

Haggard and exhausted, I reach my murky, shallow home.
 My wife waits for the vegetables and my children for sweets; around me, they roam.
 "You bring things for everybody except us," their face reveals.
 Not even at my home, I get tranquillity; it feels.
 Picking out my journal diary from the shelf,
 I conclude and write, "Life is a parody in itself."

-Aadya Jha (2nd Year)

Autumn's Symphony of Change

Autumn's hue, a season of change,
 Leaves fall a bittersweet range,
 Golden hues, a final dance,
 Before they bid the tree a chance.

The once-green canopy now bare,
 A melancholy atmosphere,
 The trees stand tall, yet so still,
 Their limbs, a skeleton's chill.

The wind whispers through the trees,
 A gentle lullaby, it seizes,
 The leaves, they twirl and spin,
 A final waltz before they win.

Their colours, a kaleidoscope,
 A final burst of life, a hope,
 Their fall, a reminder of the past,
 A promise of a brighter fast.

The earth below, a blanket soft,
 A bed of colours, a new birth,
 The leaves that nourish the ground,
 A cycle, a profound renewal.

The trees, they stand tall and strong,
 Their limbs, a framework all year long,
 Their roots, a foundation deep,
 A symbol of life, a final sleep.

The falling leaves, a sign of change,
 A season's end, a new range,
 A time for growth, a time for rest,
 A cycle, a never-ending quest.

-Tanya Bose (3rd Year)

Myriad Hues of Amber Stone

The amber stone necklace in my cupboard,
 reminds me of my mother, who dwells in her heavenly abode.

I still remember the sparkle in her eyes,
 When I wore it for a ceremony on her advice.

When the necklace shines,
 Emitting rays of many hues,
 Its beauty can only match the smile of my mother, now subdued.

Her mere presence in her yellow dress and vermilion parted hair,
 made me feel the spread of divinity everywhere.

Alas,
 Yellow is no longer a happiness symbol of mine,
 For it sends chills down my spine.

Nonetheless, whenever I adorn the necklace of amber stone,
 It takes away all my blues on its own.

It makes me feel her warmth again,
 Taking me down the memory lane,
 How I wish to be with her all by myself once again.

But such cherished wishes are not answered in the end,
 No matter how hard you try, nature shall never relent.

Be as it may,
 My faith shall never dwindle,
 With her choicest blessings from heaven,
 My hope shall always kindle.

-Abhigya Singh (2nd Year)

Here We Meet Again....

Here we meet again,
 Choking our senses and melting at our grieving condolences.
 Huge smiles appear on the faces of humankind,
 It seems they know how to pretend and dig through calamitous mines.
 Broken hearts, too scared to trust again,
 Still binding onto someone who can make them believe in love and rain.

-Harshita (3rd Year)

Adulthood's Veil

In childhood's hue, we chase our dreams with glee,
 Our hearts full of wonder, our spirits free.
 We dream of magic, of adventure and of fame,
 Our imaginations running wild and tame.

As we grow, the world's harsh light does shine,
 And our dreams, like leaves, begin to wither and decline.
 Responsibilities and burdens weigh us down,
 And the innocence of youth is lost in the town.

The dreams we had of fame and fortune, of wealth and might,
 Give way to the realities of life's cold light.
 We trade our childish fancies for the mundane and the dull,
 And our hearts, once full of hope, now grow old and hollow.

But though our dreams may change, our hearts remain,
 And though we may lose our innocence, we gain a new refrain.
 The dreams of childhood may fade with time,
 But the dreams of adulthood are born in their prime.

For in adulthood, we find a different kind of dream,
 One that's rooted in reality but not tamed or blunted.
 We dream of love and family, of home and hearth,
 Of a life well-lived, of joy and of mirth.

So let us not lament the loss of our childhood dreams,
 For in their place, we find new dreams and new themes.
 Let us embrace the changes that adulthood brings,
 And find joy in the dreams that our hearts still sing.

-Tanya Bose (3rd Year)

Breeze Out of The Chaos

Like the morning breeze,
 Fresh and calm;
 I wish, oh I wish
 I could be calm amidst
 The chaos of daily life;

Without a doubt of mind,
 I wish to speak of what one's heart desires,
 Oh! I wish to be there among the crowds, with happiness
 And not with a broken soul;

Life would be easier;
 If, only if, one could listen to the
 Voice inside their fellow beings,
 To stop being judgemental against all circumstances,
 Oh! The unending wish of mine to be heard,
 And to take the morning breeze without a doubt in mind
 remains just a wish

-Renthunglo Jami (1st Year)

Colour of Emotions

They weren't special,
 It was I who designed
 a beautiful moment and
 coloured them with my emotions.

I have lost that picture now,
 My favourite from those times.
 Sometimes, I blame the colours for being wrong.
 Sometimes, the colour says that the craft wasn't capable for me.

Craft and colour argue collectively,
 Blaming only me for my mistake.
 Painting the beautiful craft with dull colours,
 I realised that the colour was not dull.
 Instead, I chose a beautiful colour for a dull picture of mine.

-Shashank Singh (1st Year)

For the Leftover Women

It's a cold, bleak December night,
and I can hear the loud cries and shrieks of the women from a distant shore.
The women who have lost so much on the battlefield of everyday life,
without even being given an equal opportunity to fight.
Women who cried over their lost dreams and all their lives could have been.

For the woman who was not allowed to cross the sacred threshold of her home,
borders drawn across her fate and forehead.

And for the woman who was burnt to prove her chaste self.

For the woman who drowned in the pool of her blood,
for not bleeding on the marital bed.

And the woman who was forbidden to read,
forced to steal a book that belonged to her son.

For the woman whose morality is directly linked to the length of her skirt.
And the woman whose dupatta could not save her.

For the woman who was too opinionated,
or it would have been a perfect match.

And for the woman who is constantly reminded
Of how her skin is just not white enough.

For the woman who sold herself to feed her children.

Labelled a fallen woman, no labels for the men at her doorstep.

For the woman whose marital value lies between her thighs,
her cries are a private affair,

Must not go beyond the four walls of her soon-to-be grave.

For the woman who was bare-handed,
still stood unflinchingly against the enemy.

And the woman who was forced to pick up the sword in her virgin hands.

For the woman whose head only ever bowed down in front of the guillotine,

And the woman who mercifully murdered that animal of a man.

For the woman who was left on the battlefield,
soaking in her infant's blood.

For the woman who was a warrior, fierce and protective, yet questioned for being one.

For the women.

Women in the home,
being told not to go out and play in the sun.

Women in the kitchen,
adding tears to the unsalted food.

Women in the bedroom,
mourning the loss of right to their own bodies.

Women in the shower,
silently washing away the painful reminder of an unwanted touch.

Women in the hospital,
 pushing a soon-to-be killed daughter from between their legs.
 Women in the university,
 desperately holding onto their books, and benches, papers and pens.
 Women who bring forth life,
 being declined the right to their own.
 Women who never speak,
 like the ideal docile, delicate sheep with no backbone.
 Women in the bedrooms,
 women in the showers,
 women in the hospitals,
 women in the universities,
 women in the battlefields.
 Women crying, and touching.
 And embracing, and laughing.
 And loving, and sharing.
 A haunting tale of women mourning women.
 Women celebrating women.
 Brave and bloody women.
 Shrieking and screaming.
 Shrieking and screaming.
 Shrieking and screaming until the world goes deaf.

-Swapnil Shashwat (3rd Year)

❖ ❖ ❖ ❖ ❖

Disarray's Sonata

In the cluttered chaos of worldly fight,
 I seek refuge where worries take flight.
 Each chord a jumbled mess, each symphony a knot,
 Shielding me from the world, a tangled thought.

Through the disarray, I find my retreat,
 Where clutter reigns, and turmoil is sweet.
 But as the song fades, reality's screeching scream,
 Throws me back to the ground with little reprieve.

In the cluttered silence, longing remains,
 Yearning for escape from life's messy chains.
 Alone with my thoughts in the chaotic space,
 I crave the sonata, its comforting embrace.

-Shivangi Pandey (3rd Year)

Where Do We Go After We Die?

What happens after the last goodbye? Where do we go after we die?

I think about it and the afterlife; I wish we all could get an insight.

Some say there is another life after death; well, who knows if it's just a myth.

I believe we have one life, and it's the only time we are alive.

So, what happens after the last goodbye?

Where do we go after we die?

My heart aches when I think about it,

I get scared and cry a little bit,

Why are we even alive if we must die one day,

I think about it, and I have nothing else to say.

So, what happens after the last goodbye?

Where do we go after we die?

Good people die first, you must have heard,

Then shall I forget all the good deeds that I have learned?

Will you be remembered after your death?

But does that really matter if you're already dead?

So, what happens after the last goodbye?

Where do we go after we die?

Some say the body dies, but the soul lives forever; now, have you ever seen a soul?

So, does that even matter?

It's the only thing that haunts me, as I have already lost a gem,

And I know if it's gone, it's never going to come back again.

So, what happens after the last goodbye?

Where do we go after we die?

I think we should think of this as our only life, do all the good things

Who knows how long we will survive.

Don't let the bad things affect you in any way; maybe it's just a bad day.

If you do good to others, you will always get the same back,

You will always have everything, and you will never ever lack.

-Vaibhavi Arya (1st Year)

A Day in the Life

I saw a touching exchange in the metro today. The lady sitting across me was visibly anxious as she spoke to the woman beside her. They seemed to be familiar with each other, but I soon realised they were just strangers sharing their woes. The lady opposite me talked about her son and how he wasn't taking his studies seriously. "He spends all his time playing games on the laptop, barely studying...! I don't know what to do

anymore. He's a smart kid, I wish he would apply himself."

I smiled, covering it with my hand. The woman reminded me of my mother and her complaints about my little brother.

The second lady listened compassionately as the first lady poured her heart out. She offered words of reassurance periodically. As their conversation deepened, the second lady began talking about her problems. She was on her way to a nursing home to visit her ailing old mother. She described how scary it was to watch your mother lose her memories. You could almost hear the tears threatening to spill over as she spoke about her mother's inability to recognise her anymore. The first lady's eyes welled up, too, but she quickly wiped them away and hugged the poor lady.

Before seeing what happened next, an announcement alerted me to my destination. "This station is Malviya Nagar. Please mind the gap between the platform and the metro." I hopped off, wishing I'd been able to watch their interaction to the end. It occupied my mind as I walked to college.

It was odd in a way. People can't confide in their friends and family but have no problem pouring their hearts out to strangers. The interaction was sweet in a simple, human way. Both the ladies just wanted to feel heard and validated. It was a simple instance of humans just being human. We're not as complex as we might imagine in situations like this. We all need a bit of reassurance to make life more bearable.

As I walked along, lost in thought, a voice called out behind me. "Hey! Hey...! Wait up, let me accompany you to college!" I turned around to see the figure of a short girl rushing towards me. I smiled at her warmly. "Oh, hey, Aditi! It's nice to see you again after so long." She smiled back at me appreciatively.

Aditi hadn't attended a class for over a week following her breakup. The breakup had come as a massive surprise to most people. Aditi and her boyfriend seemed like the picture-perfect pair; they would post the sweetest pictures on Instagram. But apparently, things weren't as glamorous as they made them appear on social media. It reminded me of something my mom once said. "You'll notice that the people who post their lives on social media often tend to be unhappy in real life. They just need the validation they get from likes and comments." It was a sad thought, I hoped it wasn't valid for Aditi. Before I could suggest the topic, she had been whisked away by a group of friends. We waved goodbye, and I hurried over to my class.

Reaching the right room, I apologized for being a bit late. I quickly scanned the room as I entered, searching for my friend's faces. I let out a groan. It seemed they had both decided that today was as good a day as any to be absent. I seated myself at an empty desk, already planning how to scold them the next day.

Our professor resumed the discussion she was having before I entered. They were talking about the theme of a book I loved. I answered some of the questions enthusiastically, but something felt off. As the class went on, my focus kept wavering.

"My heart sank, and my mind couldn't focus on the class. I tried to force it, but it refused to do so. The day continued like clockwork regardless of how I felt, and I functioned through it on autopilot.

Soon enough, our class was over. Before I knew it, my feet had already carried me back to the metro station. The first metro was overcrowded, but I took it anyway. I wanted to go home; maybe a nap would help me return to normal.

As the auto drew near my house, I heard the pitter-patter of paws approaching the

gate. I stepped out of the auto to see two snouts stuck out through the gate, wagging their tails. I giggled and took them back inside. The second I stepped inside; they began clambering all over me in excitement. I put my bag aside and sat down to pet them. "Did my babies miss me? Aww." They thoroughly inspected my clothes like dogs do, checking where I had been. And more importantly, why I had gone without them. "I only went to college. You goofballs, and you don't need to check me every day!" Just then, my mom stepped into the room. "I heard that excitement; I knew it had to be you. Hey! How was your day, darling?" "It was good!" A white lie, I didn't want her to worry. "My friends were absent, though; that wasn't fun. But it was an alright day overall. It was tiring, though; I think I'll nap." "Okay, wait, before you do. I have to tell you about the chaos that took place today."

With that, Mom launched into a long-winded story about our neighbours and a fight they caused. She enthusiastically acted out everything that had transpired. She's good at telling stories; it's amusing to watch. I couldn't help but laugh incredulously at some of the things she described. My head is still spinning; I can't believe what a day it's been." "You handled it pretty well, though; you should credit yourself for that." "Aww, thank you!" She shook her head in disbelief. "I still can't get over how weird it was, though." "I can imagine," I said, stifling a yawn. Mom laughed. "Oh, you poor thing! I completely forgot you wanted to take a nap, sorry. I won't hold you back any longer; catch some shut-eye. Don't forget to wake up on time to walk the dogs!" "I won't!"

And so, I was in bed at last. I tossed and turned, staring at the wall. As I stared blankly, an all too familiar feeling crept over me. My heart sank, feeling uncomfortably heavy in my chest. I tried to figure out why my mood was terrible today; it didn't make sense. Nothing particularly upsetting had happened. I went over the day again mentally. Upon reflection, a considerable amount of time was spent observing glimpses into the lives of various individuals. It prompted a thought I often revisit.

I think life's like a puzzle. I'm not sure whether my analogy makes sense. Perhaps it's just something I spend too much time thinking about. Such is the problem with being a deep thinker.

But in a way, our lives are like a giant, interconnected puzzle. Allow me to explain.

The puzzle of life is made up of many different pieces. Family members and siblings make up the foundation pieces and influence it heavily. Initially, it's a very small puzzle. It simply includes parents and childhood experiences. Slowly, it expands to friends from school, the things we learn in school, etc. The older we grow, the puzzle grows with us. We add valuable experiences, the trials we face, and the friends who help us along the way.

Everyone's puzzle is unique; no two puzzles are identical. Although there may be similarities between lives, each puzzle is still unique in its own way. People may go through similar experiences but learn different lessons from them.

There are different contexts to the puzzle. First, naturally, is the puzzle of one's own life. But parts of that puzzle also fit into other people's puzzles. Cherished memories and familiar friends become like shared puzzle pieces. These shared pieces make every puzzle interconnected in one way or another—making the collective human experience one giant tapestry of puzzles. Individual lives come together to create a simple yet complex picture.

There are instances when I wonder if something's wrong with my puzzle. Perhaps I lost

too many pieces along the way, or maybe my foundation was never strong enough to begin with. I didn't know, but sometimes, it felt like something important was missing. As I sat and brooded, a ringtone cut through my thoughts. I checked who it was. It was a call from my big brother! I picked up. He asked what I was up to. I hesitated for a second, but I thought it might be interesting to hear his opinion on my analogy. After all, he's older than me, and he would have insight from years I haven't experienced. So, I told him about it.

He listened intently without interrupting. Once I had laid everything out, I gave him a moment to absorb it all. "That's a lot of thinking you're doing; my brain hurts. It does make sense, though; I had never looked at it that way." I laughed. "Who knows, maybe I'm just weird." He grinned. "Oh, there's no doubt about that; you're a little weirdo." "Hey...! That's not nice." We both chuckled.

"Jokes aside, though, I'll be serious for a moment." "You know how to be serious? Woah, that's news to me." "Hey, I just said no horsing around." "Alright, my bad! Sorry. Go on, what were you saying?"

He hesitated momentarily before speaking; I could tell she was figuring out how to phrase what he wanted to say. "I'm glad that you're a piece of my puzzle. You make my life easier. Sure, our foundations might have been a bit rocky in some places. But we made up for it by finding sturdy pieces to support those pieces, strengthening them. I think that's just a part of life; nobody's puzzle is perfect. Trust me. Also, hmm... Don't underestimate your value as a piece of other people's lives. That's not for you to decide. Leave it to us; we think you're valuable." "Awh, thank you!" I said, slightly taken aback. "I'm glad you're a piece of my puzzle, too. I don't know what I'd do without you." "You're welcome. Now, listen to me carefully. Go drink some water and put your brain in the fridge. It might melt from all that overthinking you're going through. Then, take that nap you were supposed to. You need it." I laughed, "Alright, alright! I'm going. Thanks again!" "You're welcome. Now go off to sleep, shoo! I'll catch you later." "Bye!"

I cut the call and slid back under my covers. My mind wasn't reeling anymore; I finally felt better again. As my eyes began to droop with slumber, a thought from earlier popped into my mind again: "Just a simple instance of humans being human."

And with that, I drifted asleep.

-Ria Sen (2nd Year)

The Reel and Real Life of Instagram

Among many social media platforms, Instagram is one emerging social media handle that has a widespread impact on the whole world. Its influence is being felt rapidly by people, and many users on the platform often forget to differentiate between real life and reel life. One might ask, what is the difference between the two, and why is it important to maintain this difference? The difference lies in the fact that what is often shown or portrayed on social media is opposite to the real-life picture. The main goal for many people on Instagram today is to present a glamorous image of their lives. Earlier, we had actors and actresses as examples to distinguish between the reel and real life

But now Instagram has allowed everyone to sway between these two sets of life perpetually. Undoubtedly, many people might have a similar lifestyle as they present on their social media. But what about those who demonstrate an image of a luxurious lifestyle but cannot afford one? People have been so influenced by the lives of various influencers that they have forgotten their real lives and are busy making their reel lives more interesting.

Many have fallen into the trap of comparison and showing off, and this becomes clear by the article of Ravi Handa on LinkedIn and ABP live news report about the fascinating world of iPhone purchases in India, where 70% of these purchases are made through Equated Monthly Instalments (EMIs). That means seven of every ten iPhones bought in India are on EMIs. These phones are primarily used in making reels and videos for Instagram because of their camera quality. After doing the hard work, if someone fails to get what they've imagined, the likes, the views, the comments, then it takes a toll on their mental health. They might spiral into depression and experience a lack of confidence. It is not enough just to look good on social media; we also need patience and mental strength because several people will leave no stone unturned to bring you down. So, one must be prepared for that as well.

Instagram is not only about distractions and showing off, but there are some credible sources through which we can improve our general knowledge and have a fair idea about the events happening around us, as well as in distant parts of the country and abroad. There are a lot of influencers who introduce us to the fashion world and teach communication skills through their videos. Content like this can increase our confidence and help in our personality development to a great extent. The debate about the truth behind the reel and real life might never end, and one cannot conclude whether it is a boon or a bane. It's important to remember that good things often come with a catch, while bad things can have a silver lining. So, one must know when to stop and realise the importance of one's family and friends because, in the end, this is the real life you're living.

-Harshit Kumar (3rd Year)

Case for God

Temple bells are ringing. People are chanting whatever increases their odds of getting a place in heaven. I sit in silence, looking at all of it, wondering when it will end. My mother gives me the death stare, and I join my hands. When my maternal granddad died, my mother did not pray for weeks on end. As a kid who saw her mum never missing a day of expressing her infallible gratitude to God, it finally dawned on me that she was dispirited. Not that I had trouble comprehending that the death of a father smashes your heart to smithereens, but just the part of me that tries to intellectualize experiences to get over them finally gave up. My mother was experiencing a crisis of faith. As someone in a perpetual state of a crisis of faith, this devastated me. The woman I'd argued with about offering arghya (libation) to Surya had finally done what I thought I wanted her to. Give up on God. Let me tell you, nothing is sadder than when the person

on for hope in your life gives up on it. I am weak, but I like to believe that I am not. Hope takes courage. And I have none of it. To know that your hope is in a constant state of jeopardy scares me. I've always thought of hope as a liability. So, I've always needed to give it to me. Knowing that I have it, but it doesn't belong to me, helps.

What do you do when your episodes of doubt become a full-fledged crisis of faith? You must have often heard know-all atheists say Karl Marx wrote, "Religion is the opium of people." But he also wrote, "It is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of our soulless conditions." Now, I'm not writing this to convince you that Marx was a man of faith in his heart of hearts. But even he knew that even if it seems unnecessary and nonsensical, it isn't entirely baffling why people want a God. Faith. Belief. Hope. Dependence. When the people you look up to show you that even they feel what you've felt, and it isn't just some dwelling in the abyss of self-pity that led you to it, it feels terrible, and it feels great.

What do you think of when you think of God? Whether you're a Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Jew or whatever you choose to be, when I say God, I mean some higher being to look up to. To be able to depend on someone. Isn't that what all of humanity wants? To have the luxury to keep your troubles at bay because you know even if you have to face them, someone's there to hold you when you start the trust fall. Who is God? An imaginary friend? Momentary joy for the weak? Or the self-absorbed, flawed being who throws you into the pits of hell the moment you show signs of disbelief?

Tatt tvam asi. 'Thou art that,' you remind yourself. But this realization is what makes it all daunting: having to depend on oneself. No matter what people say, God is necessary—at least, for wretched fools like me. I do not intend to romanticize religion or hide the obvious wrongs it perpetuates. In a volatile atmosphere like the present, it is essential, more than ever, to sit and reflect on where we have gone wrong.

Do not be mistaken; I don't think people need religion to be good people, but the hope of it all and the resilience of it intrigues me. Maybe all this devotion and faith in God does not stem after careful thought but blind imitations of what you saw growing up, and more often than not, it is that. But I think hope is necessary, and for the vast majority, God gives them that. For some, it may be a dad caressing his fast-asleep kid's head. For some, it is the bliss of a shoulder to lean on. For some, it is the realization that it isn't that deep, and it all shall pass. I hope that there's still good in the world. There is sadness in the world, and maybe today, it is more than ever before. But oscillating between episodes of denial and despair is not the way. It is the hope and the action it encourages that helps. Maybe God is hope, after all.

-Navya Shukla (3rd Year)

Not So, Dear Fear!

How strange it is to write you a full-fledged letter when all I wanted was to be free from your strangling captivation! I remember your entering into my life and shrouding my better judgment with your never-ending monstrous palpitations. I remember your ceaseless attempts to get the entitlement of my working days. I remember crumbling, collapsing, sagging, and begging for your mercy. I remember my succumbing to you at

last when I could no longer fight.

I still wonder how all this started. It took off with me being introduced to the concepts of win and loss, success and failure. There was this first night when you infringed on my sanity with numerous possibilities of what-ifs. You never left. You extended your stay and dethroned me from my control.

There were times when you messed up with my best friend, my mental sanity, and behaved as if nothing happened. You made me pretend in front of my parents by forcing me to lie to mask my genuine emotions. Your power became so intense that my identity started to fade. You kept growing stronger and bigger, and I kept feeling weaker and smaller.

Why did you enjoy ruining me and adore my rotting? I never felt so hollow inside me that whatever I tried to fill it with never added up. Staying with you became like standing in front of a mirror with horrid imagery of a world that constructs itself with cruelty and brutality. Being with you made me unravel the inhuman mysteries of this labyrinthine planet through the perusal of my mind.

I think you remember how we parted ways. It was scary, but not in a conventional way. I hit the rock bottom of my life. And I realized it did not change my parents' love, my sister's trust, my friends' faith, and my destiny. I felt free after a long time. I came to understand the true meaning of the famous dialogue, "Some infinities are bigger than other infinities". I dismantled your claws and broke myself free from the prison. I had one project: to be a better version of myself.

So yes, here I am, your old thrall, writing to let you know I succeeded in my project. I think you will be happy to know that I still remember you. On some cloudy nights and some sunny days, I rethink our relationship. Sometimes, I feel that you wanted me to do good, perform better. That is why you came. Maybe I am right, perhaps I am wrong. But one thing I can assure you, I am happy. I don't know if I will post this letter to you. I don't have your address anymore.

Lastly, I sincerely hope I don't ever meet you again and muddle into the world of insecurity and indecisiveness. However, a small part of my heart wants to thank you for making me strong and brave. Stay healthy, my acquaintance, and try to be a necessary evil.

Never Yours,

-Avisha Srivastava (3rd Year)

Dystopian Echoes of 1984 to Current Realities

The dystopian novel "1984" by George Orwell is a piece of work that addresses the regressive aspects of the current political situation, which withholds the fundamental rights of citizens. This novel is a cautionary tale against the dangers of authoritarianism that depicts the totalitarian regime in its worst form. Orwell's portrayal of the insidious nature of power as the ability to reshape human minds is highlighted in the quote, "Power is in tearing human minds to pieces and putting them together again in new shapes of your own choosing," which portrays the tactics of manipulating truths and using their propaganda to sway public perceptions. The same can be compared to our present reality, where the rise of misinformation on social media platforms and biased

news channels employed by the current regime insinuates the dangers of stifling the voices of dissidents through instances of intimidation and attacks on utterances critical of the government. The government's surveillance and control over every aspect of citizens' lives in the novel is echoed by the introduction of the Press Information Bureau in our country, which violates freedom of expression. Furthermore, Orwell's depiction of government control over personal data resonates with contemporary issues surrounding authorities' access to Aadhaar data by private firms.

This work alarms us to limit governmental intrusion into our private affairs. We need to advocate for transparency and accountability in governance so we can strive to protect the fundamental rights and freedoms essential to a thriving democracy.

-Sarvjeet Kaur (3rd Year)

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The Beauty of Feeling Loved

Experiencing love is, personally speaking, an incredibly wonderful sensation. It's that feeling of being cherished, appreciated, valued, and capable where happiness seems to course through your very being. It's those small gestures of appreciation for the little things you do. It's knowing that there's someone who will stand, unwavering, no matter what the circumstances.

This love is not solely about the romantic partner; it's about being loved by someone you genuinely care about. It's pure and priceless. The small acts of kindness they show you are more valuable than the most extravagant gifts. Knowing that someone cares deeply for you, loves you unconditionally and offers unwavering support creates a feeling that no matter what life throws at you, that person will be there. We can't face every challenge alone; we need someone to be there holding our hand, a soul to trust, and someone who trusts us. We need a soul mate, a shoulder to lean on.

Everyone deserves to experience love. The feeling that you, too, are important, special, a gift, and a blessing in someone's life makes you more alive, awake and alert than before. It gives you a new way to reach your destiny. This feeling of being loved is auspicious, genuinely unexplainable. There's no physical change, but then a new chemistry surrounds you. Which keeps you moving up, letting things the way they are, and changing how you see the world. Suddenly, you feel like a new life has happened to you. We all have imperfections, but that person who loves you wants you to hold all those imperfections. For that person, those are the natural qualities that make you attractive to them. Even the moon, with all its craters, is a sight. We hold on because our parents, families, friends and nature love us. It's what makes the leaf more exquisite than the flowers.

-Madhu (3rd Year)

Franz Kafka and *Metamorphosis*: A Short Analysis

Examining Kafka's methodologies and motivations leads us to his seminal work, *Metamorphosis*. This novel, the sole piece he completed and published before his untimely demise from tuberculosis, offers profound insights into Kafka's writing prowess. Of course, every reader has their own observations and analysis. Still, one prominent conspicuous observation was that he was a man whose writings, in a way, thrived on his life experiences—specifically his struggles. In my opinion, the philosophies in his narration made him so relatable. His words reached the niche they were written for. A cursory glance at *Metamorphosis* would reveal a straightforward and conventional method of narration, but on a closer examination, we see troublesome topics. We see troublesome issues that we, as a society, have taken upon our shoulders- judgment, apathy, emotional rigidity- being some of them, highlighted as the undertones of the story.

Metamorphosis, as a story, is more than simple fiction. It gives us a glimpse into Kafka's plausible emotional struggles as an individual. Ironically, the said struggles are common to men of every class, creed, and gender. The said struggle revolves around lingering loneliness in a man's life, misunderstandings, and the eventual metaphorical metamorphosis a man or woman goes through. As a reader, I have two contrasting views on this metaphorical 'metamorphosis'. Kafka displays a classic example of the destructive aspect of 'metamorphosis, where the protagonist completely loses his sense of self and receives little to no support during his cry for help. At the same time, this process could also push a person on a completely different tangent. A rare scenario, yet one that is possible, at least in my view. As mentioned earlier, Kafka beautifully weaves the storyline to portray the downside of 'metamorphosis'. The protagonist is shown under the spotlight of a victim, who, following a series of events, drowns deeper into the waters of uncertainty. There is an aspect of predictability when it comes to Kafka's narration here, but at the same time, the reader is kept on their toes. Now, this catharsis is either achieved by the subject's reliability (being the emotional turmoil of a man) or by the two possible tangents that the story could've built upon, as discussed earlier. Nonetheless, the novel is undoubtedly a masterpiece in literary technicalities and every other aspect. It is a must-read for every literature enthusiast. Kafka should be a go-to writer for budding or enthusiastic readers because he manages to take the reader on an emotional ride with what can look like a straightforward novel.

-Saumya Bhatt (2nd Year)

Expectations of Parents Towards their Children and Vice-Versa

What about the silent struggles we carry, the unspoken fears that weigh us down even in the warmth of those we call parents? Parents as they are the only ones who take care of and cherish you throughout your life. But despite their closeness, there are many feelings, secrets, and insecurities we keep hidden from them, etc. Often, our parents encourage us to see them as friends, urging us to share everything. Yet, despite our desire to confide in them, our subconscious sets boundaries, reminding us of our roles

as their children. We get scared if they don't understand our feelings and will scold us and maybe even go as far as to punish us. I just want to sit with my parents and share my insecurities as the eldest daughter. What if I can't meet their expectations or fail to make them proud? What if I stumble during my tests? Will they still accept me? It's not just me; countless children like me, whether the eldest, middle, or youngest, silently yearning for validation. We may never ask for it and never voice our emotions, especially not to our families. Yet, here I am, gathering the courage to speak up about my feelings.

People often say sons are close to their mothers while daughters are close to their fathers. However, I find myself not particularly close to either of my parents. As a woman, my mom and I understand each other, but there's a noticeable gap between me and my dad. I'm not sure if anyone else can relate to my feelings, but that's the dynamic between us. I will be talking about my dad because people often talk about their moms but not dads. I've never really had a heart-to-heart conversation with my dad in one sitting. However, I vividly remember the last time we talked for about 10 minutes. It was about choosing my major in 11th grade. My parents pushed me to pursue maths, but I wanted to follow my passion for humanities. Surprisingly, my dad agreed. Since then, I haven't had the chance to sit down with him to discuss my life decisions or what's happening. There came a day when I realised just how fortunate I am to have him as my dad, as he always supported me in every way possible without making me realise that he was still there for me when everyone refused to send me to Delhi for higher studies, but he always had my back. From my school days, he's been my guardian, ensuring I never stumbled. His efforts, often unnoticed by me, have been unwavering. Even now, I sometimes overlook the many things he does for me. His sole wish has always been for me to remain resilient and excel in my chosen field.

Before I moved to Delhi, I used to believe that my dad didn't love me as much as other fathers do. He never dropped me off or picked me up from school, and he didn't call me often. Even now, he doesn't call me regularly. He just sends monthly allowances, and that's all, but occasionally, we do talk on call. To be clear, we both have a very normal relationship, no family issues of any sort, and everything is perfectly fine. My dad is in the Army, so we don't live together. But one day, I realized he always had my back without me knowing; there is a whole back story to it. My grandmother once told me something about my dad, and that's when I realized how much he loves me and wants the best for me. Of course, I am not the pampered child of the household, but I still feel the most loved.

Honestly, I've grown accustomed to being alone in my household, so I don't mind who's around. However, there was a time about a year ago when meeting my dad at the station just to have lunch with him meant the world to me. It was a simple gesture, but it held so much significance. Sharing that meal with him was incredibly meaningful despite his brief four-hour halt. At a party one day, I realized that I never told my dad that I was glad to have him as my father and I loved him so much for everything he had done for me. And even today, I haven't done it. Sometimes, I wonder if I had ever given him happiness in his life. Was he ever proud to have me as his daughter? What if I might not be able to fulfil his expectations of me? What if I might not be able to make him proud? What if I fail my test? Will he accept me?

Whenever I think of these questions, I know the answer to almost all of them, but still, I wish to be wrong. I want to have a heart-to-heart with my parents, to ask them if they trust me, if I've ever made them proud, and if they're satisfied with the path I'm on in life. I'd like to know if I've brought them a sense of pride. It's strange to admit, but I've never hugged my parents. It feels almost cliché, like something out of a typical middle-class family scenario. Affection isn't easily demonstrated.

-Namrata Saraswat (3rd Year)



Isekai'ed

"The unknown ruin!" smiled Keiji with a look of astonishment.

"What is this feeling? I am happy but nervous." Said Hiroki.

They felt chills running down their bones. Damion and Yua, the elves, were also shocked to see it. They weren't aware of the ruins, so they were nervous.

"Honestly! Our work's done here. We have shown you the previous ruins, guided you in, and you guys cleared it, but this is beyond my knowledge," Damion said to everyone.

The only dwarf, Aerin, was excited to go inside as she had an opportunity to find a rare mineral ore for her manufacturers. These would act as raw materials. There were four more human races other than Lisa, Keiji and Hiroki. Akihito, Haruto, Tsuki and Daichi.

They were overly excited to explore the ruin. However, hidden ruins were a particular type, as stated in the name. More information about them needed to be provided. They were known to be among the most dangerous ruins with higher-rank rewards but higher-ranked traps and monsters.

"If you guys don't have a problem, then I would like to ask if you are willing to enter this one or forfeit it," Daichi said.

"We will be going in." Hiroki looked at Keiji and Lisa and said it while raising his hand.

"Me too." Said Aerin.

"We will join too." Akihito, Tsuki and Haruto replied together.

"We want to forfeit. But leaving our newly made friends in this situation will only sadden us, so we will accompany you guys, though we will be useless here," Said Yua, looking at her fiancé Damion.

"This ruin might be unknown, but you still know better than us. Please guide us in." Said Lisa while smiling.

They all agreed. Keiji tried to open the gate, but he was zapped as soon as he touched the door. Tsuki used her thunder element control and tried to absorb all the electricity, but she was unable to do so.

"Try pushing the gate yourself, Tsuki, and Aerin; give Keiji those gauntlets," Hiroki said while winking at Aerin.

Aerin understood and took out the resistance gauntlet she had. The gauntlet had the property to withstand any element, though its durability wasn't something to be proud of. Keiji and Tsuki opened the gate of the ruins. Everyone felt a cold breeze rushing through the gate and a zap of electric currents randomly in the air. These zaps weren't dangerous. They just tickled whenever someone came in contact.

After they entered the ruin, they felt the presence of ice under their feet. There weren't any lights or fire torches, so it was pretty dark. They took a step forward, and Akihito used his fire element to light up the way, but it was probably a bit late because when

they looked down, there was no land beneath their feet.

They started screaming. Hiroki screamed at Akihito to light up the way down a bit more. Even in that extreme situation, Akihito managed to control his actions. The fire lit all the way down. They weren't falling but slipping on a slanted ice wall connected to the gate's threshold to the ruin. But even after knowing this, they couldn't keep calm, as their speed was no joke, and if they were to hit another wall... DEATH!

It would have been better if they knew what was down there so they could deal with it. But they didn't have any idea. Suddenly, they saw the path end. They dropped inside a cold lake. The water was too cold, and the worst-case scenario was zapping electricity in the air.

"Tell me you used your abilities here." Said Keiji to Lisa.

"No. I didn't. I was too scared to focus." Said Lisa.

"At least say yes even if you didn't! Don't lower the already low morale of your comrades!" Said Keiji in a whining tone.

Everybody started laughing at this. Damion said, "We should move out of here as soon as possible. We can get frostbite just by staying here, and if the electricity in the air gets even a bit strong, it will be attracted towards water. Resulting in our demise in this realm." Everybody nodded and started moving out.

Suddenly, the lake started glowing green. Everyone felt anxious and started swimming out quickly. At that moment, Haruto noticed something big moving inside the water. He got goosebumps and started swimming hastily. Seeing this, everyone looked down. Their eyes were wide open with fear. A monster with a size incomparable to any monsters they had encountered before. Besides, its back had glowing plates. These plates extended from its back to the tail.

Even though everyone was scared, there were two who were excited and afraid at the same time. They were Hiroki and Aerin. Suddenly, Keiji shouted, "Come on, you dumbass! Let's see who can swim faster." Everyone was shocked.

Keiji started releasing an aura all through his body. His eyes started glowing, his body started transforming, and he began experiencing a lot of pain in a radius of 50m. There was no animal other than that big ass monster. Keiji transformed into the same monster but inferior in size. He took everyone and swam through the lake till the end.

As soon as he threw everyone on the ground and jumped out of the water, the huge monster leapt through the water but couldn't catch Keiji. Keiji transformed himself back. They were unsure if the monster would come out of the water.

"He won't come from there." Said Yua.

"He seems to be scared of something." Said Damion.

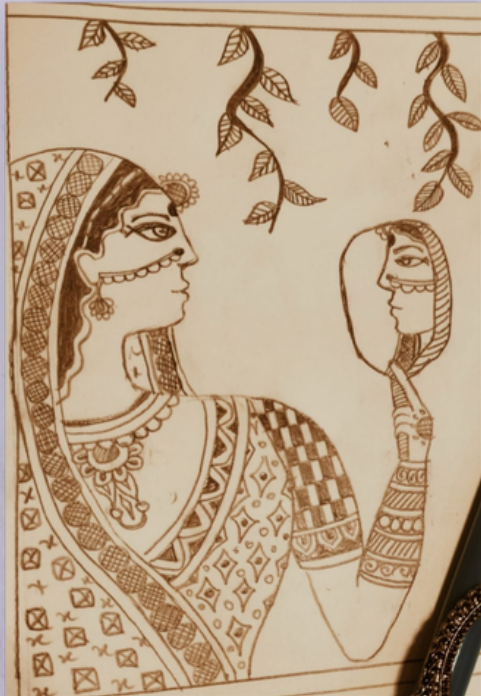
"What do you mean by something? He might be scared to come out of the water because he needs water for survival." Said Keiji.

"No. If that were the case, you would have felt the sensation of being unable to breathe outside water." Said Hiroki.

Everyone looked surprised to discover what was making such a monster so uncomfortable. They had no choice but to move ahead, but everyone started having second thoughts. "What if there's a monster stronger and much more ferocious than the beast we just encountered?"

-Amit Kumar (1st Year)

Artistry Alcove



Abhigya Singh (2nd Year)



Amit Kumar (1st Year)



Tanya Naggi (1st Year)

