



STUDENT VOICE

Submissions to: studentvoice-fes@acamorocco.org

Summer 2024

battlefields

EMPTY SHELL

Reem Sendide – Advanced 2

There's not an ounce of empathy in this vicious society.
All these sparkling smiles, are nothing more than plain lies.
I wish I could enjoy your company one last time.
You, the only person in whose presence I felt allowed to cry.

Tell me, how does it feel to be free from these wicked and wretched chains?
From this unstoppable acid rain, this frightening theatre play,
this universe where we are cursed every day?

Was I truly that blind? Was I that out of my mind?
Not to notice that those were your last words
Before you abandoned this world. Your departure left me hanging, uncertain of everything.

Whenever it starts snowing, unwanted memories of you start flowing.
Whenever it starts pouring, I'll remember how lively you looked while dancing.
Drenched in the summer rain, laughing through the pain.
Would it have changed anything if I had came running,
if I had rushed to you the moment I heard what you were up to?

Now trapped in my own guilt, in the unreachable tower I myself built
They say time heals everything, so why isn't it working?
I may not be the damsel in distress or the princess in her shimmering dress,
But I've always been waiting for a reaching hand to get me out of this hell.

Out of these crimson flames, into which I fell

Burns all over my skin, the ugliest I've seen.
My head is constantly reeling, I feel like screaming.
Unmatched cruelty in this rotten community.
A vast place where everybody's your enemy

"It's all in your head" they say, so why, no matter how much I pray,
does a faint voice tell me this is none other than my bitter reality

And no matter how hard I try, my sins will follow me until the day I die.

DISTRESS CALL

Ikhlas Ouhna – ETII 2023

I am laying on my back, in my room. I am wearing ripped jeans and a deep caramel shirt tinged with grey and dark red spots. I am looking at the sky, at its garish flares. They look so far, yet they are so close. They are far enough to look like fireworks and close enough to look like burning fireballs. They appear so small and innocuous up there in the sky.

is smoke and fumes. The lights are shells and bombs. I am laying in what used to be my room. My window is a demolished wall. My bed is the floor. My jeans are punctured, worn-out, cut, and torn from getting out from underneath rubble, from they falling over and over again escaping rifles, and being thrown by the blasting bombs.



Image credit: Salma Marghich, FezArtLab

*You could guess it's a beautiful summer night,
The sky is clear, the stars are bright,
My shabby clothes are trendy,
And my room has a skylight.*

You are wrong.

It is morning, yet the sky is not blue. It is covered by grey mist, yet it is not rain clouds. There are no stars, but there are no fireworks either. My jeans are not ripped to look fashionable. The colors of my shirt are not to make it beautiful. It is winter, and in case you are wondering, yes, I feel cold, and if you thought I am laying on a cozy bed, well, again, you are wrong. The grey mist

*Yes, I was in those jeans.
Me, that lived only nine years.*

I can clearly remember the last time my shirt was white. It was the last time I woke up to a morning so quiet. Dirt gave my shirt its caramel color. The grey is from the cement of my bombed house. The red, the dark red, is blood. But it is not just mine. My fabric has soaked in these colors creating a memory of its own. The threads tangled with a past I cannot wash off. Maroon smears of family and strangers have merged and I can no longer say, which is which.

*Dry, dark, and dead,
You would not believe they were
Once bright, warm, and crimson red.*

The blaring deafening silence, the warmth of chilling blood, the crude feel of graveyard dirt, and ghastly corpses. Come the looming dash of soldiers' footsteps, the chink of machinery loading, phantoms from a faint past punctuate the invading agony and the stubborn thought of doom. So vivid, devout, and ablaze, chains my body cannot shake. You can only imagine the severity of the montage; a reality lived cruelly over and over again.

*I sleep to these nightmarish scenes,
I cannot scream, I cannot run.
I wake up relieved, it was only a dream.*

But then everything flashes in at once and my brain wants to shut down. I am flooded with memories, I scream, I run, but I never wake up. I am only a child. I sleep alone in the ruins of my house between the walls of sadness and sorrow. My loneliness becomes a mere shadow, as hunger becomes my truth. But a growling stomach is the least perturbing of these brutal tunes.

*In bright daylight, darkness looms.
The air is dry, and a new gloom blooms.
My ears are deafened by grievous news.
My eyes blinded to colors,
I fade and swoon.*

I am only a child, but I know how heavy a wall can be, and how rotten a corpse smells. I know how much it hurts as a bullet pierces your flesh, and I know that knives hurt less. I know the fever of infection, the smell of burning flesh. I know the sour taste of gas and the sore pain of burning eyes.

I am only a child. Do you know we have twenty-four ribs, twelve each side? I know because I've seen them. Do you know that when you see your siblings running around, your father smiling, your mother setting the table and calling you for dinner, that it is just a dream?

The enemy never runs out of ammunition, they have more tanks than cars, more firearms than kitchen knives, and more missiles than human beings, or at least that is how it seems.

*Oh! Home. Oh! Country.
When did you become a place of savage butchery?
Tell me, when did you become a red cross on the map,
a target for the mad and cruel, an ugly painted
cemetery of grey and red?
You smell of blood and flesh.
You sound of dolor and distress.
You taste of guts and gore.
You look a miserable mess.
Your nights are dire and dreary,
Your days are monstrous and risky,
and your streets are empty.*

Even the buildings feel lonely. Death haunts you, and the dead haunt the living.

*Oh! Country. Did you not send a distress call?
Did you not tell them, we are suffering,
we are tortured and bleeding, we are slaughtered.
Send it again, they did not hear your call.
Our enemy is an oppressor, brutal, inhumane.
Oh! Home, Oh! Country,
The innocent do not fear the executioner.*

Have faith in your people. Your people are brave and persistent warriors. They are ravenous hyenas, but we are a pride of ferocious lions. Our hearts are our armor, our faith is our army and as kings, we will defeat their lines. Our claws are honed and our tusks are mighty. Our triumph is destined, only its time is not determined.

*Patient we will be,
listening to the ticking of the clocks,
math will not prove their victory,
although their bullets outnumber our rocks.
The aggressor will fall, bitterly.
History is proof, the tears of the oppressed
our guarantee.
Our cause is right, and with that
we will vanquish our enemy.*

*From cradle to grave, we will resist.
From the North to the South, we will persist.
From the East to the West, we will insist.
Hey! Enemy, Fear justice and retaliation,
Fear our mercy and gallantry,
Fear our honor and our purity,
Fear our faith, and our dignity,
Fear that we are loyal, and fear that we are right,
Fear that you are mortal, and fear that I am a child.*

*The cheery azure skies become pitch black as coal.
The promise of starry nights and twinkling twilights
are engulfed whole.
A horrifically horrid horror film became my life.
With tragedy, tears, fears, and grief, it is rife.*

The first sequel, took my father, a decent man. He died in prison. He fought injustice, he was human. He loved his country, but they called it treason, so he was tortured to death.

The second sequel, took my brother, a lively boy. His dream was to fly a real plane, not just a toy. He lost his life to a bomb that struck our home. His cause of death? I don't know. His crashed skull, his spilled guts, his drained blood, his suffocated breath, or all.

The third sequel, was for my mother, my dear mother; brave and strong and tender. She spit on a soldier and slapped his face. He grabbed her upper arm, his hand on her face. He hit her. She fell on the ground. With a psychotic smile, he carried my crying sister, to a room. I grabbed his leg. He kicked me hard, my tender mom took a knife and stabbed him. He threw my sister, and stabbed my mother back. Eight times. Then he left. My mother? She died.

The fourth sequel, took my little sister, she was four. She could not bear the cold. She could not bear hunger. She was meager, her eyes were sunken, her focus long gone. She was asleep, or so I thought. A small dry slice of bread was all I brought. I tried to wake her, but she wouldn't. I chewed a morsel of bread, put it in her mouth saying- "You're still asleep." Oh, how much I wanted to believe so! I was

supposed to look after her, take care of her. Little sister, it was too early for you to go. These pictures are engraved in my mind, how heavy the burden.

*My heart cannot forget. My pain does not abate.
My chest is burning. My soul is aching.
It's excruciating.
It hurts. It hurts. It hurts. Oh God! It hurts.
My body a slender skeleton carved with wounds.
It barely holds my soul.*

But as bad as my body hurts, my heart hurts even more. They're at my veins; cruel, heinous monsters. They suffocate my breath, making my dreams, nightmares. My time on earth agonizing, and my hopes despair. They crash my country like a doll's house. They crush humanity like an autumn leaf. They crash our reality as if it is a movie, a painless simulation. They crashed the *human* in humanity and worshiped the *self* in selfishness. They made their opulence our poverty, their well-being our plague, their luxury our ordeal, and their greed our persecution and massacre. In the end, they were best at crushing reaction; as if humans were their stiff marionettes.

In every direction on planet earth, the wind carries our resounding screams and our dead silence. Migratory birds sing the sad symphony of our merciless reality, and its lamentation, and pain. The clouds are releasing the pouring heavy rain. Relentlessly. But deaf, blind, and insensible were our supposed 'rescuers', and abandoned, forsaken, and left to our fate we are; their supposed 'rescued'.

Our distress call, became just; distress. My country is real. I am real. My family was real. Our suffering is real.

*Open your eyes, world and you will see.
Oh, tell me, how inhumane can a human be?*

I am laying on my back, in my room. I am wearing ripped jeans and a deep caramel shirt tinged with grey and dark red spots. I am looking at the sky, at its garish flares. They look so far, yet they are so close, so close indeed. "Farewell".

THE TAPESTRY OF NOSTALGIA

Yasmina EL Hamouni — XXXXXXX



Image Credit: Nohayla Ommar

It's a simple word that can either destroy or build up. Nostalgia, is a feeling for times gone by, for places that have vanished or are far away and to which, we often retrospectively attach feelings.

You try to go on with your life until you feel nostalgic for someone or something. A memory that has disappeared forever; and there nostalgia becomes a poison.

You must be young to know how to live without nostalgia. Later, we cling to all kinds of feelings: good ones, bad ones, things that are not very healthy. Renewal.



Image Credit: Nohayla Ommar

Nostalgia is like sun-burn: it doesn't hurt in the morning, it hurts in the evening. To be nostalgic for your old life, for the innocence that you have lost over time, for the love that you felt with someone for a moment.



Image Credit: Oumaima Belkhammar

Gone is he, and his love. Nostalgia has taken your freedom.

You can never turn a new leaf in your life without nostalgia.

For me, writing is not an end in itself; it is the nostalgia of an enchantment.



Image Credit: Nohayla Ommar

BULLYING

Fatima Zahrae Louaraini — Beg5

What is bullying? Sometimes we hurt each other's feelings by mistake or lash out when we're angry, but bullying is different. It is hurting someone on purpose. It's a behaviour that hurts, harms or humiliates a person.

There are lots of different types of bullying.

Active bullying: includes physical harm.

Verbal bullying: is using bad words, teasing and name calling.

Passive bullying: is when the person is ignored or made to feel invisible, such as not letting them join a discussion for example.

The stress and trauma of being bullied can manifest in various physical symptoms like stomachaches, headaches and trouble sleeping and excessive fatigue. It can also lead to social withdrawal and can make someone feel isolated and lonely. Long term effects include affecting someone's mental health and leading to issues like anxiety, depression and even self-harm.

My friend's sister's experience has made me choose to address this issue. She has had bad vision problems since she was a child and she needs to wear thick glasses all the time. In her case, she can't use medical contact lenses

except on occasion, then they must be single use and only worn for two hours per day. But her husband constantly bullies her, calling her ugly and mocking her for being visually impaired.

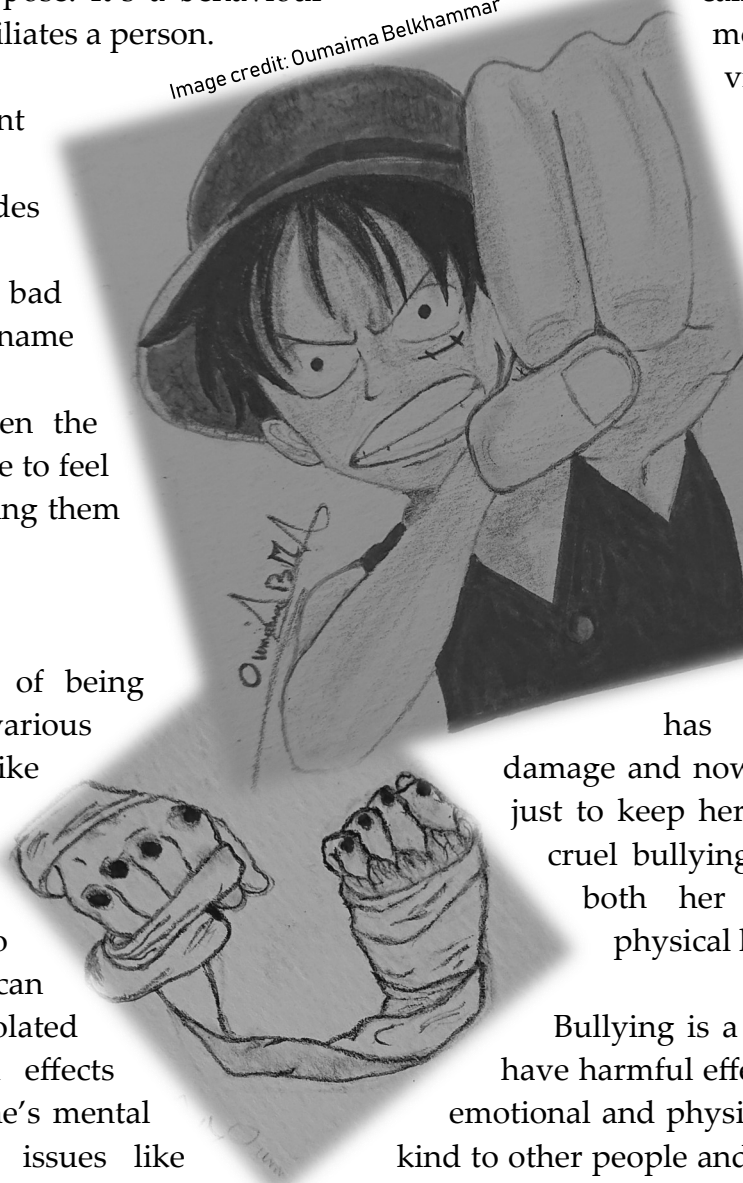
His criticism of her appearance has so deeply affected her self-esteem, that she has stopped wearing glasses and started wearing contact lenses all the time, just to avoid his toxic words.

As a result, this has caused serious eye damage and now she requires surgery just to keep her sight. Her husband's cruel bullying has directly affected both her emotional and her physical health. It's not right.

Bullying is a serious issue that can have harmful effects on an individual's emotional and physical state. So please, be kind to other people and before you say something, remind yourself that it may be hurtful or harmful. Put yourself in someone else's shoes. Educate yourself to respect other people and always remember that you are awesome just the way you are.

Don't let anyone break your self confidence.

Image credit: Oumaima Belkhammar



INTERVIEW with Zackariaa Aitouraies

Author: *It Pleased To Kill*

SV: Firstly Zackariaa, I'd like to warmly congratulate you on your recent book "*It Pleased To Kill*". Was crime fiction a genre you always liked or felt drawn to?

ZA: Thankyou, crime fiction? Not really. I was more interested in human nature, and unfortunately, crime and murder are aspects of that nature. The literary genre itself was not within my interest.

SV: You are a young writer and a previous ALC student I believe. Can you tell us briefly about your journey to becoming an author?

ZA: I participated in the speaking and writing contests at ALC Mohammedia, then in 2017 I won a writing competition and went to Tangier for an international writing workshop and conference held by the University of Iowa. I've been writing for about seven years now and when you're heavily invested in something, you don't really notice the changes that are happening to you. I am still a student, to an extent. I am working on my PhD, and I am still writing too.

SV: In order to fully create the protagonist of your novel, you had to journey into the mind-set of a psychopath. What was that like?

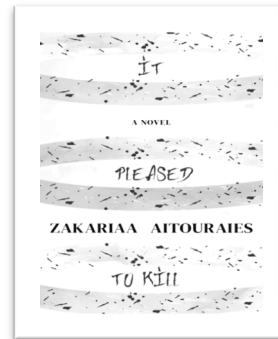
ZA: An interestingly easy, yet awakening experience. The thing that surprised me most about writing Anwar, and perhaps this is due to the extensive reading I had done into the nature of evil, was how easy it was for me to embody him in my thoughts. The writing seemed so smooth that I started questioning whether I actually believed most of the things I was toying with! But that's what made Anwar interesting to me. Writing this story was a mirror, for me to analyse my own beliefs and thoughts, which is why we need art and literature.

SV: What do you think that experience taught you about yourself and others?

ZA: Understanding one's own capacity for evil, is the first step towards being a good person.

SV: So, is *anyone* capable of extreme violence?

ZA: I wouldn't say extreme violence. But the energy that lets a person do heinous things exists in most of us. The best of us channel that energy into something good.



SV: In light of current world events playing out, what do you think has to shift or change inside a person in order to be able to commit such dreadful acts?

ZA: I think we should be taught more about evil and why we engage in it. Protecting children from evil only paints a rosy picture of the world that isn't true. But if we can understand evil, and why people do it, I think we will be able to also understand why it's much better not to engage in those things. I heard somewhere that if a teddy bear always thinks it's good, it could kill and justify the killing as being good. Because how can something good do something bad?

SV: What do you think is worse, committing violent crimes, or covering them up?

ZA: I'll let Anwar answer this one. He might say something like. *There is a good philosophical question, if a tree fell somewhere in the Amazon rainforest, and no one heard it or saw it, did it really happen?*

SV: Are you ultimately hopeful for the human race and the nature of our deeper sentiments overall?

ZA: The fact that we made it this far is a testament to the goodness of most people. The only reason why evil is prominent is because it stands out. But I personally believe in the goodness and love of humanity.

SV: Any advice for other budding writers and poets?

ZA: Keep an open mind. The moment you feel alienated from anything human, you need to think deeper about it. Read a lot, and write even more!

INTERVIEW with Noam Keim Author: *The Land is Holy*

Noam Keim, author, was one of our NAWAT-FES artists in residence this year.

Student Voice: How did you start your "writer" journey?

Noam Keim: I trained as an academic, so I have always written, but creative writing came to me during the COVID pandemic: I started writing a zine, where I told my story as a Jewish Arab whose family colonized Palestine. People liked it and a friend told me "You know you're writing a book, right?", and I decided to listen to her and work on a manuscript that became *The Land is Holy*. I started applying to residencies and writing workshops, and along the way my teachers told me that my writing was good, so I continued working on it, until a publisher picked up my book.

SV: What (if any) are your tips for someone wanting to start a writing career?

NK: I think the most important thing is to trust yourself. We all have stories to tell, and the hardest thing about writing is that it takes time and patience. The second thing is: build a community. Writing isn't a solitary practice and it's really important to find people you trust who will tell you what's good and what's not. I meet with the same group of writers every two weeks to critique our work, I have a friend I see twice a week and we write together, I volunteer to read for writing journals etc...I made so many friends in the writing community, and they have opened many doors for me.

SV: You describe your book "The Land is Holy" as a collection of essays...what does this mean?

NK: The Land is Holy is divided into 15 essays that are all organized around plants, animals & ancestors. Instead of writing a linear story that goes from A to Z, each essay tells a portion of my story. You can read each essay individually, but together they add up.

SV: What does "cultural identity" mean to you?

NK: That's a big question! In the US, where I live, many people are not connected to the culture of their ancestors. When I think about cultural identity, it's a way for me to feel close to the people in my family who came before me. Their foods, traditions and rituals etc.



SV: In your book talk at the ALC, you talked about a transient concept of "home". As a child of multiple migration stories, can you tell us a bit about that?

NK: Sure. I was born in the Zionist State and we moved to France when I was a baby. At 23, I started traveling; I lived in Canada, Vietnam and Nepal. I live in the United States now, so I have been an immigrant my whole life. It has taught me to be really good at adapting to new places, but also often feeling like there's not just one home, but many.

SV: In your day-job you work as a trauma counselor. How (if at all) did this work influence or educate your writing of the book?

NK: In my day job I talk people through the difficult moments of their life and I often meet people on the worst day of their life. When I was writing the book, I wanted to tell stories that would help people believe that all of us can heal, all of us can have better futures.

SV: Finally, what do you look forward to every day?

NK: My first cup of coffee, cuddling with my cat, seeing my partner laugh, sitting in my garden and observing the butterflies and bees. I am a simple person.

SV: Noam, thanks so much, and we wish you all the best with your upcoming publication!

The STUDENT VOICE gained an exclusive pre-publication excerpt from Noam Keim's book of essays, reprinted here with permission.

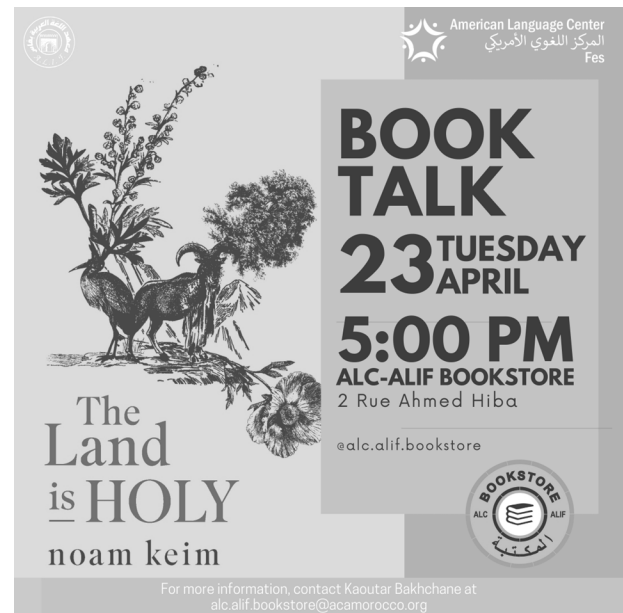
The Aoudads

When I think about home, I think about Marrakech, a place I have only been to once, as part of an ill-planned family vacation with my parents and younger sibling in 1999. I think about the mellah of my grandparents' childhood, a place that only lives in the memory of the dead.

Safta Zohara and Saba Eliyahu told me and the rest of the family that their love story started in childhood. They told us that they had to leave so that they could be together, and that it was the reason why they left Morocco in the late 1940s. The love alone was meant to explain leaving families behind, transiting through Marseille and a refugee camp in the Zionist State. Their love alone explained a life built on the desert that was home to other people, away from the imperial city of their childhood and the grave of their beloved ancestors.

I know that Safta Zohara and Saba Eliyahu flattened their story to make it palatable. I know that they were both part of a moment in history when Arab Jews were manipulated to leave their homelands to populate the lower echelons of the Zionist State and justify the rejection of Arabness as a whole. I know that, because their story of migration is the story of thousands of people, the books and websites have taught me.

In 1957, a year after my mother was born in the Occupied Naqab city, where her parents were placed by the Zionist authorities, a city currently known as Beer-Sheva, Texas wildlife officials released about forty aoudads in the Palo Duro Canyon to offer hunting opportunities to ranchers. In English, the aoudad is also called the Barbary sheep, as in the sheep from the Barbary Coast, the 15th century term that describes the North African littoral west of Egypt. As in the coast of Morocco



Algeria, Tunisia, Libya; as in what my people have known as al-Maghrib, the Maghreb, the West.

The first record of an aoudad on the American continent dates to a zoo in Jersey in 1900. They brought them by boats, from the ports of Africa to the coasts of Turtle Island. Mountain goats extracted from the deserts where they thrived in spaces that look impossible to the human eye to be placed behind the protection of fences, to be observed and enjoyed by the crowds of the Eastern seaboard.

I wonder if, in the zoo of Jersey in 1900, they built structures that resembled the rocks aoudads climbed in their home landscape. I wonder if, in the zoo of Jersey, they marveled at how little water they needed to survive. As the aoudads settled in their new artificial habitat, their numbers grew too fast for the zoos to keep up with the new generations of desert sheep ... they thrive[d] adapting so well that they became part of the thread of destruction, displacing the remaining longhorns and a multitude of plants and smaller members of the Texan ecosystems. The aoudads followed the rules of the land they were asked to live on ... and bred so fast that not even the ferocity of Texan hunters could eradicate them ...

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WHY WAR?

Aya Ez-Zahraouy — Intermediate 6

WWI, WWII, Russia and Ukraine, China and Taiwan, Algeria and Morocco, Saudi Arabia and Yemen, Israel and Palestine... I need days and weeks to mention the all the wars and conflicts that have occurred in history and those that are still happening.



Image credit: Mohamed Amine Houari, FezArtLab.

War is defined as 'a violent conflict between two or more states or nations' for a variety of reasons. Personally I think, it's too polite. Wars have existed for thousands of years; we can take as example the battle of Mahabharata that happened to overthrow the throne of Hastinapur. Greed for power, glory, prestige, wealth and lands are the main reasons for wars. Then comes the non-acceptance of differences in ideologies, religions and cultures. Humans are naturally inclined to impose their ideas and opinions on others, and as we are instinctively violent, we resort to war to solve our disputes.

But we must rise above the jungle motto of "Eat or be eaten", because civilization is measured by how it treats it's weakest.

HEARTS AT FAULT

Chams Gaizi—Book Club

*Who are we?
Animals we are,
or illuminati?*

*We're lost at heart,
Yet we're hungry.
We're fools,
full of secrets.
Born numb,
and dead ashes.*

*You think you got it.
You think you're above it all,
when you're just one part of a broken system.
Fighting an endless battle.
Fighting an endless war.
Losing, while trying to break free.
It's getting me out of me.*

*Snap! Wake up to reality.
We are different, yet we're all the same.
You may be riding a different wagon,
But we're all riding the same train.*

*With a foolish smile on our faces,
We bought the tickets, just to fall off a cliff.*

*Aren't we fools?
Fools, full of secrets,
Full of wonders.
Born free,
Just to die ashes...*