

# ***The Fractured Horizon***

**By Ahmed Mumtaz**

Samir sat at the edge of his bed, his eyes closed tightly against the cold, mechanical hum of the heater that seemed to mock the warmth of his memories. Each time he opened his eyes, the harsh, dim light of his small apartment replaced the vibrant hues and lively sounds of his homeland, creating a jarring contrast.

In his homeland, he was once again with his mother. Her laughter, a melody of warmth and comfort, filled the air as she cooked dinner, her hands skillfully kneading dough. The scent of spices, rich and enveloping, surrounded him. Samir reached out to touch her shoulder, but his fingers brushed nothing but cold, empty air, yanked back to the frigid reality of his new life.

In another cherished memory, Samir was with his wife, Layla, and their young daughter, Yasmin. They were in their small garden, the sun casting a warm glow over their faces. Layla was teaching Yasmin to plant flowers, her laughter mingling with Yasmin's excited giggles. Samir watched them, feeling a deep sense of contentment as Yasmin's small hands carefully placed the seedlings into the soil. The scene was a perfect snapshot of family bliss—simple and serene, with the promise of a bright future. These moments were a vivid contrast to his current isolation, offering a fleeting escape from his struggles.

Before the war, Samir had worked as a teacher, his life filled with the everyday joys of family and community. He was known for his gentle manner and dedication to his

students, always finding ways to bring out the best in them. His early days in the new country had been filled with hope, but the language barrier and lack of job opportunities had eroded his confidence. The endless job applications and disheartening interviews made him question his worth, leaving him struggling to reconcile his past identity with his current reality.

Samir's days became a continuous battle between his two worlds. In his new country, he struggled with language barriers, the relentless search for work, and navigating a society that felt alien and indifferent. His job search yielded nothing but rejection after rejection, leaving him with a growing sense of inadequacy. Yet, when he closed his eyes, he was with his father, tending his garden. Samir watched his father's hands work the soil, each touch a reminder of simpler, happier times.

The memories provided both a sanctuary and a prison. When he was happy, he closed his eyes and reached out to share those moments with his family. Conversely, when sadness overwhelmed him, he sought solace in the illusion of his homeland, drifting back to moments that felt increasingly elusive. These illusions became a haven, a refuge from the stark loneliness of his reality.

He often spoke about coming to this country to build a better life for his family. His conversations were filled with tales of hardship and resilience during the brutal war that consumed his homeland. Yet despite his promises and hopes, he had been unable to secure a stable job. His days were consumed by fruitless job applications and disheartening interviews, the weight of his unfulfilled dreams pressing down on him.

The unrelenting struggle took a toll on Samir's mental health. He grew increasingly despondent, retreating more frequently into his illusions. Entire days passed with him lying in bed, lost in memories of a life that seemed increasingly out of reach. His physical health deteriorated, his energy sapped by the relentless cycle of hope and disappointment. Samir's once-strong frame grew frail, his eyes losing their former light as he retreated deeper into his illusions. His body, weakened by the emotional strain, mirrored the disintegration of his once-vibrant spirit.

The truth was far more devastating—his family had perished the night he fled to the new country. As they were leaving, their house was bombed, reducing it to rubble and claiming all lives except his. Samir lived only through the illusions he created, clinging to vibrant scenes that were mere remnants of a past that no longer existed.

One day, as his condition worsened, Samir decided to revisit a cherished childhood memory. In his mind, he swung over a mountain, the wind rushing past him, the thrill of freedom lifting him into the sky. The sensation was so vivid that he clung to it with desperate longing. The swing symbolized his yearning for a time of carefree joy.

The boundary between his dreams and reality had become perilously thin. Immersed in the illusion of the swing, Samir felt the weight of his despair lift momentarily. He stepped outside, his mind still lost in the imagined swing, seeking a final escape from the crushing weight of his suffering. He moved through the streets with a sense of disorientation, the lines between his imagined freedom and his actual plight blurring into one.

Without fully realizing it, Samir stumbled onto the subway tracks. The train roared towards him, and as it collided with him, the impact felt like a swing—a final, brutal flight through the air. In his disoriented state, the collision seemed to offer a brief, tragic release from his suffering.

The train came to a halt, and the station fell silent. Samir lay there, a tragic figure caught between the realms of illusion and reality. In his final moments, the lines between his memories and his life had irrevocably merged, leaving him in a space where he could finally find rest.