**What’s in a name?**

**by Rehan Ali**

It’s the wind. No more *Samurai Jack*. Only pixels of black and white, dancing in a relentless pattern on the screen. No more cartoons. What to do now? Where to go? Oh, it will be another boring summer day in Bridgewater House.

The subdued light from the clouded sky glowed through the cracked glass. Better than no light. The window opened with a struggle. A fresh breeze crept in. My hand reached out at the wall that swarmed with rusted satellites. A collection of black and bronze unblinking eyes. I felt the rough mesh with my fingertips. Pulled it towards me. It has to face eastwards. The perfect angle. Did it work? A quick twist of my neck towards the buzzing screen says no. “Hmm…, maybe if I do this?” No, still not working. But the view wasn’t all bad, I guess. I could see the New Bridge. Traffic lights. Cars. Trucks. Bikes. And people. But I was looking from underneath, half veiled and half breathing. I am under.

“How many times do I have to tell you?” She walked in yelling. I had been told before of the dangers of falling. Although landing was really the dangerous part. I pulled away with a sigh, the window closed off the world once more. “But what about my cartoons?” After all every ten year old child watched cartoons. So I couldn’t be that different. “You will have to do something else.” But what? I guess I could roam the hostel, see what I could find. Perhaps a friend.

Best friends, I had so many. Reza from Iran, Ose from Nigeria, Roman from Russia, Chechnya, China, Kenya, Iraq. This was the brief window of time where I had none. They would come and go, I would remain. Ten years. Solitude, confined**.** I was part of the world and yet not. Wandering from floor to floor. How many paintings on the walls? 28, for sure. One had a gold frame, and a bowl placed by the edge, like me on the window sill. I’ve become familiar with the edge, as has my mother.

She wanted to give us the open sky and unfolded sea. To blaze a trail so we could succeed. The mail that had been left for her had different intentions. I had seen it earlier, by her bedside. Brown and large. I’ve always known, I guess, that there was something to be feared. I can feel it coming. Although my eyes are shut tight by the force of childhood, I can still sense it. Yes, it’s here. And much like the weather, she couldn’t quite keep it together. She’s been losing sleep and I’ve been keeping myself awake. I can sense her thoughts. “Can I make it before I lose my mind? Who chooses what stays and what fades away? We need a revelation. It’s time to pray. The old remedy. But it’s a prayer I can’t complete tonight. Where do we go from here? Self-serving prayers only go so far.”

“Why do you live there? What is it?” Questions I’ve heard growing up. We’re sewn into the landscape, can’t you see? How can we return now? The pressure of heavy choices. You want to get it, right? But you don’t understand the violence of a choice. And all we are, are choices not a thousand different faces. My history is etched into documents. My life simplified into black and white. It wasn’t enough? How long before I am released from behind these walls? I want my future. You can make do with my past. I need the day, I’m growing tired of this night. But still I remain nameless. Like the others. “What’s in a name?” you ask. I wish to be named.

Call me whatever you want. Anything you want. Tell me what you want me to be. As long as freedom accompanies your calls. This place is a house, but this soil is a home. And it is where we need to exist. We can’t leave now. And go where? Land over land, blood over sand. What a place to come from. Will we really no longer be able to stay? Much like the river Suir under the New Bridge, my mind runs free. But will it drown me? A fantasy of a world not overgrown, a world of compassion and promise remains fantasy after all. Will we drown?

But there’s plutonium in our veins. Don’t come too close, we might explode. A volatile group. Kept away, atoms apart. Our ambition, a complex equation. Our hope, a catalyst. There’s nothing quite like this. Our love, the purest element. Can you feel it? Our half-life, a quarter of yours. Oxidised by a stranger air. Will we always be afraid? Or is it we who are feared. Risk it all for one bright spark. Let our chemicals spill. Let our fumes dissolve. Born out of the earth, soil darker than yours. Breaking down again, although the barriers are lasting. And you simply can’t get enough. More, more, more, just not enough.

But this is a good place to fall. What do I choose? At the end of the road, when there’s no more hope. I choose me. I choose us. I am young. So let us fall, but let us restart.