

Like a zombie, I walk down where the road finally gives way to many alleyways. Some lit by flickering tubes, others are not so fortunate and look like hallways to horrors unknown.

I close my eyes and pause for a moment, then make my way toward the place where the main road takes a bend. It's a couple of clicks away from this spot, I murmur. Another vision drags me inside.

"It's all here." She points to her body. "All here in ze body!"

"So you don't believe in love?" I ask. She looks at me, cheeks puffed with smoke inside her mouth, and pauses a little before letting it out in my face. Through the choking layers of pungent smoke, I see her kohl eyes staring at the grey water flowing through the Hooghly. Thankfully, the distance from the bridge above us kills the noises of a city afternoon. The fading sun paints the water crimson.

We sit there, amidst jungle and rubble, with a train track behind us.

"I do," she replies, "but my love is not like yours."

"Physical, then." I nod my head. She hits at me, her nails biting through my flesh in what appears to be retaliation. Then she stops and throws the cigarette into the river. The fisherman idly sitting in a boat looks at her and then gets back to his fishing lines.

"Think whatever you want to."

"It's awfully late for hanging around, isn't it?"

I follow the known tone, only to find that it is coming from her. She sits there on her four paws, ever so lazy, pouring her glances on me. Every now and then she breaks out into a cleaning chore, meticulously licking her legs and body.

Cats are such fine creatures.

"You're the silent type tonight," she speaks again.

"I'm always silent, they say," I reply, much to her amusement. The wide smirk looks like a whiff of her whiskers.

"How have you been lately?"

"Not bad. The city has enough havens for a cat to find her necessities."

"Wish I could say the same about humans." She winks at me. The contagious grin returns, now in me. I walk a step or two towards her, trying to alienate myself from the yellow light of the halogens above. She licks her paw, watching me find a niche.

"I was thinking about you," I quip.

"Everyone I've met usually does," she replies. "I'm quite an impressionist." Cats are, I think to myself, momentarily broken off from the current errand. She continues.

"You should go back to her."

"I don't know for sure," I fumble.

"Love isn't something you find in an empty street, you know." She gets up, leaps on a stack of cardboard boxes, and pauses there. We return gazes.

"You've been ignoring the obvious signs." She fixates on me. "Did you even give it a thought?"

"I'm not her salvation," I whisper, almost to myself.

"She's good in bed, no?" the cat questions, feigning a disinterest in my murmur. It feels like a jolt, this feline inquisitiveness.

I look at her, baffled, out of words.

"How did you feel?" She's persistent. The breeze picks up. A couple of leaves come down falling, some yellow, some not so. Somewhere a wind chime tolls, ever so faintly. It feels surreal.

I want to tell the cat about the musky smell of our sweat. Pink Floyd on the wall. The bell chimes and the cigarettes. About her

biting my lips with pleasure, moaning and arching like a gymnast on top of me.

I want to tell her how awkwardly it had started that night, and how unceremoniously it ended. There we were, drenched in sweat, our energy exhausted, lying with each other, her hands anchored to me.

She was smoking that night again. In the pallid orange glow from the cigarette tip, I could just make out the outlines of her drained face.

"How did it feel?" The cat's voice echoes through my visions of that night.

I thought she wouldn't reply. "Empty" was the word she spoke, before letting out another jet of smoke. "But you have amazing lips." Her words had ended with a moist gush of her breath on my face, her lips touching mine.

I remember that was the first time I had smiled that night. I also remember that we had spent the rest of the time talking, nothing specific, but there was an overwhelming feeling of something missing—as if we wanted to do it, but found no meaning in such physicality.

"Hollow." I come back to the present. The cat is still there, looking suspiciously at me.

"It's . . ." My effort to satisfy her curiosity dies early.

"What are you searching for exactly?" she asks.

I look at her.

"I don't know anymore." The hollowness I feel is irrepressible.

She stretches herself and gets up on all fours. "Time for the cat to disappear," she mews, and then looks at me with care. "She's the one."

"Stop getting lost. You both are." The cat looks at her tail, wiggling it gently.

I try to reason with the logic inside my head, but it doesn't comply. What comes out sounds terrible, needy.

"I want to see you again."

"I'm always around." She flashes the familiar Cheshire grin of hers and gracefully leaps to the railing.

"I didn't catch your name," I shout. The expression comes out loud, tearing the silence.

"Cats have no names," she replies, "It's you humans who give them names, trying to identify yourselves with them. So you can call me anything you want."

"Irma," I react. "I'm going to call you Irma."

She pauses a little and says, "You love Frost, don't you?"

I nod. "Figures," she says, and disappears in darkness.

I lie on the bed, beside her. I know she isn't asleep, but she silently keeps her eyes closed and says nothing.

"I met the cat today." I break the silence, whispering, and turning back to face her. "It was weird."

She says nothing. I run my hand over her, trying to feel her warmth. The feeling of disconnectedness returns, creepily. I attempt to come close.

*I don't want to feel lost again.* The little distance between our bodies feels like eons.

"What are we doing here?" she asks me.

"Searching for love," I innocuously reply. She comes closer—I can feel her breath on me, and it doesn't smell of nicotine.

"I feel . . .," she says, "I don't feel anything at all." The tears are warm. Bare skin touches bare skin.