

Today when you came into the lecture hall, you saw the boy in spectacles, so you waved at him, and he waved back. He looked moody, didn't smile, didn't say a word. You wondered briefly what was on his mind. As you went down the aisles, you realized that you could hardly remember his name.

You found your friend in the third row, centre block, and she greeted you with a grin and an overexcited wave. Good morning, girl, she said. You waved back with a laugh, and as with every other morning, you took the seat next to hers.

You were early, too early, and there were only fifteen, twenty people in the lecture hall. The lecturer hadn't even arrived. The emptiness seemed to expose the cold of the morning for what it was and you shivered. From your rectangular brown bag, larger than you needed it to be, you retrieved your jacket, a black one with gold stripes across the shoulders. As you put it on, you prayed that it would be enough to stave off the cold.

Then you made a whimper, a soft, whining noise. Early morning, two-hour lecture, frigid atmosphere. And as you rubbed at your eyes, your friend laughed and put her arm across your shoulders.

~

It wasn't fall, if there were seasons in a place such as this. Yet this morning when you woke up, the leaves were drifting off the trees and falling onto the grass like sheets of rain. And as you watched them outside your window, fluttering, dancing, you thought that maybe they weren't falling but that they were completing their ascension. And you didn't move even though the alarm clock was ringing in your ears. You just lay in bed, staring. It felt as if you had chanced upon some secret that the earth held dear, but you couldn't tell anyone. It was a secret like sadness and love and joy, because no matter the words you chose, you knew that those were things that could never be shared.

When the wind subsided, you dragged yourself out of the sheets, stopping the alarm clock without even turning to look at it. Remnants of yesterday began then to trickle into your mind and it was only at that moment that the world began to make sense again. Somehow in your sleep you had lost yourself on time's backwards-and-forwards map, but it was all easily resolved as soon as you started to remember. Here. Now. Today. This morning.

What followed then was routine. Brushing of teeth, a shower, change of clothes, packing of things, this morning, every morning. And when you walked out of the hostel and into the open, the sun fell on your skin and you were grand. Softly the wind resumed, and there you watched the leaf-shaped angels fall to the grass once more, satisfied that you knew their unnameable secret.

~

In the lecture hall, it continued to be cold, and it baffled you somewhat to think that a pleasant morning outside was a bitter stillness inside. You pulled your black jacket with gold stripes inwards, as if it would shoo the thought away.

The lecturer adjusted his black-rimmed glasses on his narrow nose and did a sniff that made you laugh. Your friend asked you what the joke was, but you really couldn't say. Some jokes, you think, live away from the domains of words and languages and even understanding. Not everything can be expressed in words.

He began his lecture with a joke or two (in words) and drew a tenuous connection to the actual lecture content (in words). It was a long time before the morning haze lifted, before attention and thought set in. It was, you realised, like waking from a dream, and his words, once echoes and whispers, now took on meaning and consequence.

Bored, you found yourself looking around, and the pallid green cushions and mossy maroon carpeting of the lecture hall made you feel sick. As if you were running out of breath, you found yourself having no choice but to heave a sigh. You turned to your friend, in her grey vest and black pants, eyes fixed on the screen, unable to share your disgust.

When she finally noticed your gaze, she turned to tell you that you looked as if you were short of sleep, and she must have been right because the words took a while to register. Just sleepy, you said to her. Just sleepy, she said. As if for good measure, you broke into a yawn. Still dreaming, you said then. She laughed as she placed her hand on yours. Better wake up, miss, she said, and you laughed.

The lecture seemed to proceed without you. You only managed to catch fragments of it, but fragments would have to suffice, because you always knew that sometimes you dreamt and the colours would be prettier than when you're awake. Then you took up your pen and made some notes, still dreaming.

~

When you reached the bus stop this morning, the sun had climbed a little higher and the wind had grown slightly warm. On the benches you placed the bend of your hand as you sat and observed with sleepy eyes the morning crowd emerging around you like a cloud drifting in. They all had a certain buzz, an exuberance, students sharing jokes they had had in their heads from the last night, spreading gossip and making complaints, interjections and enjambments.

You thought about the day ahead. You thought about the lessons, the people, the hours. It was a voice that interrupted your reverie, and you looked up to see a classmate from long ago. He waved at you, so you said hello and smiled. Then he went on his way and was gone as suddenly as he had appeared.

You thought for a moment that you had imagined the encounter, that his Nike jacket, washed-out jeans and Converse shoes were actually non-existent. And maybe that was true. Maybe he wasn't real. And what would it matter if he was? He was gone, and whether or not he had existed there and then was meaningless.

Laughter, widening of eyes, because you surprised yourself with those absurd, pretend-philosophy thoughts. And then as you looked around you, the rest of the world just continued, in their ignorant babble and candid conversation. And you with all your little secrets and silly thoughts remained invisible. (Perhaps you were a ghost, you thought.) There were so many things you could tell them, so many pieces of you that you could share, and all they had to do was ask. But they never did.

Then the bus arrived and you went up quickly for fear of not being able to find a seat.

~

The lecture was drawing to a close when you adjusted your jacket again. The lecturer's voice had long been overtaken by the impatient noises made by impatient students. And you couldn't help but think, Hurry, hurry, as if your life depended on it. You couldn't explain the feeling. It was urgent but inexplicable. The thought of it saddened you a bit, because it made it feel as if it didn't matter what you thought, that the lecture was still going to last as long as it had to. So you convinced yourself then that you really were invisible, that if you hadn't been there, it would all have been the same.

You looked to your friend and she wore a frown on her face. Perhaps to justify the notion, you thought that maybe the want for the lecture to end immediately was fuelled by her impatience, that you didn't want to see her frowning. You weren't pleased by this explanation, but there wasn't a better one to be had, and so you waited, futilely and unnoticed, a ghost in the moribund land of the blind living.

~

When you got off the bus and approached the stairs during the morning, you looked around carefully for familiar faces. You didn't want to appear rude, to seem as if you were deliberately ignoring people. It did not last long because your thoughts soon drifted into daydreams again. The sun fell onto the staircase in untidy diagonals, and you climbed the steps, all grace and curls.

Your footsteps grew heavy when you were near the top of the stairs. You felt impossibly tired, and you couldn't quite explain it. And then there was a smile flush across your face as you found it all rather amusing. What a weak and useless creature, you almost said.

Like a practiced routine, you walked steadily to the lecture hall without conscious effort. People went past you like shadows, immaterial and vague. And when you were almost there, you looked up and saw the canopies perched far above you, framed by light, and you knew then that the world was yours, and then you grew sad because you knew that there was someone to share it with, but he was never going to ask.

~

Today, after the lecture, when you were leaving the lecture hall, you saw the boy in spectacles again. He sat there, completely still, and you managed a courteous smile. As he watched you walk away in your black jacket with gold stripes, disappearing into the crowds, he couldn't understand why he felt so cold.

LOVE SONG FOR J.

DARYL LI