



The Departure

NUJHAT ASLAM

I'll walk past the sea shore,
None to witness my departure—
As the marine drive's deserted.
Only soft traces of my footprints
Left behind.

The full moon shall stay bright
Leaving me under the spotlight
The waves reaching my bare feet—
Shall be the eager audience.

I'll walk past leaving behind,
The scattered pebbles of memories.
And the rush of waves
Shall erase all traces
So that you won't follow.

WIRED

MASHIAT LAMISA & SHEGUFTA ARMIN AHSAN

What if we met not in this decade but in one where love would be a mechanical process? Would it be different then? Or is it what it is? What if we met at an age when engineers created love like they create machines now? What if the first time you saw me was in a small tube inside a laboratory or in a box that ran on a key? What if the first time my heart skipped a beat was when I saw how perfectly your insides were programmed in JavaScript and Python? What if chemical reactions between my mechanical lips and yours created magical sparks the first time we kissed? Would it be different then? Or is it what it is? What if marriage meant our hearts getting intertwined medically and not just signing off our bodies to each other for our carnal desires? What if the small laundry bag never existed for you to work on in the morning when I left for office? What if I gave you hologram flowers instead of the real lilac I got for you years ago? What if you could make love to me any way you wanted typing away as many codes as you needed to after a whole day's work? What if your labyrinth of suffering was programmed to another galaxy? Would it be different then? Or is it what it is?

I think I would quite prefer that. A decade where love is still a process – something to fall into, something to live through – instead of an obligation or a nuisance. Would engineers be god then? Or would they be the devil? Creating such a feeling only to have it evade you? Creating love that is always there but not quite? Creating soulmates you walk past on bus stands without a glance? What if I knew the first time I saw you in all your wired glory that you were the one? What if I still couldn't reach out because the tubes that held you had walls that were just a little too thick? Or the box that housed you had a key I couldn't turn? What if the missed beep of your mechanical heart jumbled up the codes that ran my programs? What if none of that mattered in the end and the sparks our lips created held colours and patterns so bright and intricate not even the engineering gods could replicate them?



ILLUSTRATION: RIDWAN NOOR NAFIS

We would still hold hands and shiver at the feel of electrons flowing in perfect lines from the center of our nervous systems to the ends of our silicon toes. We would still smile at each other – for each other – and the imperfect teeth that were the only flaw in our otherwise perfectly designed self would show through making it a bit more real. Not an obligation. Not a nuisance. When we're ready to be finally intertwined, our hearts synchronized meticulously so that they sounded one resonant beat instead of two, we would be signing off our souls to each other not just our bodies. I would type a sonnet every morning in hopeful fonts and affectionate colours for

you to read when you return from work in the evening. I would store away every holographic flower that you get me in my RAM and they would stay with me till my wires burned or my system crashed unlike the lilac that wilted just a day after it was given. I would make love to you anyway "you" wanted, typing away as many codes as "you" needed after a whole day's work. I wouldn't worry about the labyrinth of suffering in another galaxy as long as I had you with me in this one.

I don't know about different but it would be beautiful all the same.

Not an obligation. Not a nuisance.