

ON REPEAT

KLOW

She's looking good in the light and a distant sound is approaching getting closer getting bigger getting louder and you know *the warmth* is coming and everything else dims and it's just you and her and nothing else this beautiful thing with the slight smile that's always on her lips that she never *seems* to mean but *does* and the way she moves her body this person you barely know owns your life now and she doesn't know it yet maybe you should tell her?

Here we go again.

Delirium

SHREYOSI ENDOW

Maybe he was only a figment of my imagination. Maybe they were right. The man on my desktop background, the ring on my finger, the names on the bronze plate on the door, the pictures on the wall, none of those were real. The taste of cigarette on my lips, rose petals in my hair, the thumping of my heart, the murmur of his name, they were all make-belief. They were all cruel games that the trillions of neurones in my brain played with me.

He smelled like smoke and wild flowers, mixed with a certain type of D&G perfume. Do you have any idea how good that is? Imagine 3 AM, and you can't sleep, and your head aches like it had been bashed with a cricket bat, so you grab his shirt and bury yourself in his arms and take in that intoxicating smell and everything else starts to fade. It's when you hold on to him for dear life and everything is... okay.

They said it was sheer boredom. Or the pinnacle of depression. Or something like that. They said he was just an escape, an imaginary source of solace. A source that made me laugh and cry, and crash and burn, but most importantly, a source that kept me alive. It was like I was using him. Or maybe he was using me.

I could not tolerate his voice sometimes. His nails-on-chalkboard voice when he would read me poetry made the veins in my eyes swell and throb, made my insides revolt, made me want to smash his head against the bedside table till he couldn't even whimper anymore. He would go on and on for hours, pushing me to a point where I thought my head would burst. Sometimes I would kiss him to stop the torture. That was nice, though.

He was not really paying attention to me these days. I had to be his 24/7. I had to be every breath he breathed, every thought he thought, every dream he dreamt. I had to be every beat that his heart ever dared to beat. But things were changing. His eyes were vacant, his lips sour and dry, his hands were rough and his words were like a million swords. They said it was the drugs, that the effect was wearing off. They said soon it would be all sunshine and rainbows. But I did not want all sunshine and rainbows.

I guessed it was his ex-wife. Maybe the old hag was prying into our lives again. Or that kid. I knew he had a thing for that kid. "You can't ignore blood," he'd said. But I had left my family too. Although mother visited us last summer and father bought me a new

sweater on my birthday, but that was nothing. Wasn't it?

This morning, he made me breakfast. He said I was beautiful. He said I was the most amazing thing that ever happened to him. He kissed my forehead, and told me I reminded him of youth and life, something he had missed the last couple of years. On his way out of the door, he told me that we were going to solve all our problems and everything would be nice and peaceful.

I didn't know we were facing any problems. We were perfectly fine! Everything seemed brighter and more colourful. They said it was a good sign, although it made me feel nauseous. It was getting late, and I had a headache. And he was still not home.

Dandelions

ARMAN R. KHAN

Meet me at 9, he had said. 10, she had argued; I have to get ready, and you know that it takes time. He smiled, shaking his head a little, but gave in. *10 it is then, he surrendered. We'll meet where we first met.*

Trina didn't really have a good night's sleep, worried and excited as she was about the day ahead of her. It was a special day – the first day of Falgun. But what was really special was that Amit had wanted to meet her specifically on the first morning of spring. They hadn't been friends for very long now; three months maybe? But it didn't take

Trina more than their third meeting to realise that she had fallen for this

boy. *No, 'man',* Trina corrected herself.

Amit was absolutely charming; so culturally rich and traditionally down-to-earth. The way he carried himself around – messy hair, unshaved-for-a-few-days beard, and next to no regard for his own clothing – had initially brought the word 'aloof' to her mind. And then she'd gotten to know him, and fell in love with his do-good personality. He read *Gitanjali* on a regular basis, much to her surprise, and was taking part in a play based on Tagore's work. He wasn't the lead, but it didn't matter to Trina. She already had feelings for Amit, deeper than she knew.

And today would be a special day; her special day. So she woke up in her dorm room earlier than necessary to secure the first place in the line for a shower. She donned a yellowish-orange *jamdani* sari with a red hem. She fiddled with her hair for a while, but eventually decided to let it be. Carefully applying a little *kajol*, positioning a round red *tip* between her symmetrical eyebrows, and putting on a matching, alternating red-and-yellow set of *churi*, Trina set out to meet Amit, with her roommate Pinky flashing her a smirk with a wink.

Amit was sitting under the tree where they had met three months ago, pretty much by accident. That evening, he had a dark green shawl loosely wrapped around him. Today, he was absent-mindedly staring at the ground, a coy smile playing on his lips. His unkempt hair and equally unkempt beard went quite well with his yellow *panjabi* and blue denim pants. A bouquet of yellow dandelions lay at his left. *I like those the most, she had once told him, long ago. Because they're wild, free. And they're hard to find.*

Trina waited a few minutes, staring at the breathtaking, handsome man. She tried to stay calm, so that she didn't make a complete fool out of herself in front of him. When she approached, Amit snapped out of his reverie and stood up, his face lighting up with a genuinely warm smile. He handed the bouquet over to Trina without a word. She noticed a small piece of folded paper amidst the ever-ready-to-be-blown-off petals of the yellow flowers. Curiosity tugged her heart. She threw a questioning glance at Amit and caught him staring at her with naked adulation. He gave her a small nod, as if urging her to go on. With her heart throbbing fiercely near her throat, Trina extracted the paper and opened it.

It was a note. Five words were written in Amit's barely legible script: the first was her name, the last was his, and the three in between were her paradise.



ILLUSTRATION:
ZOHAB MASHIUR