

This Song is About...

SAM

I felt as if he'd pressed play on a tape recorder. Clandestine phone calls in the middle of the night with promises of sweeter endings.

No colour splashed over our faces, only on our tongues.

Shadows disguised as parts of our playthings. He'd press play, and I'd wait for the rewind to take us into saccharine repeat.

Never felt it in my head, what was happening. Wondered why that was happening too. Stopped asking when I realised questions hurt more than answers ever could.

Cloudy mornings are my favourite. Fogged-up glass; misty smoke creeps through the air, making its silent, harrowing presence known. Droplets, like the cheap imitation diamonds you'd get on a sidewalk, coat the windows. Cool air whistles through the unwanted spaces where my fingers reluctantly try to cover my boredom.

Nothing of note on my rear-view mirrors. More pearly drops, a few streaks of yellow and red, as cars race ahead of mine. I love the cyan sky. It mimics the coming of evening ever so convincingly.

If I could, I'd paint the entire world this colour. I'd bathe myself in it, and lay waste to everyone in my way in blue tragedy. This colour spills honesty on to my walls, and near end.

I recall once coming home around the time that night decides to slip into its [sweet] reverie. The sky, oh, the sky. I couldn't think of anything else, except perhaps prodding it with my fingers and bringing some of that colour down for you to see.

My touch, and soon it'd crumble. It'd become a fine powder that I can sprinkle onto the dirty Dhaka pavements and forget as sunlight caresses the early risers and whatever heads full of dust that they bring into the coming day.

"Can I sleep with the sky?" I'd chirp in my excitement. He'd look at me funny and shrug, say I could sleep under it, and his mind would move on to more practical matters.

"I want to pull it down ever so gently, wear it as my dressing gown before I go to bed. I think it's pretty."

"Yes, very pretty," he'd murmur, eyes glazing over under his cell phone's glare.

"I talk too much, Simon. I know I do."

"No, you don't." A sympathetic and quick glance which I reckon was supposed to make me feel reassured, or reassure me of his honesty. Don't remember.

"But the sky..."

I took my fingers to the tip of his chin, slid it down until he took notice. Looked at me, brow slightly raised.

"You want to...?"

"Nope." Nonchalant, as if my voice would allow no pitch higher or lower. My fingers danced on, lying and ever so playfully that you'd never notice. They waltz over his sticky skin, and I allowed myself a taste of his musk.

His hand would slip beneath then, and I let my body carry on with its sick facade. I didn't know what to say. I don't know how to tell the truth earnestly because no one believes me when I do.

Today, hair wet from the hot

shower I had just taken, I ran my fingers through my scalp. Let it tingle for a while, then pulled. Wanted to rip it all out and give it to you. Just enough intent to tear but not the courage to go ahead with it. Not sure why. Am I mad?

It felt nice. The throb, the mildest of pains. I didn't do it again.

The lit stick rested against my middle finger. Exhaled slowly, steadily, pondered what colours my lungs were now.

I ran the lit end, almost touching but teasingly distant, along the skin of my arms. I won't lie, I was too scared to do it. I wondered if your heat would feel the same. As gratifying? As burning? Excruciatingly irresistible?

Giggling, I shook my head, and inhaled again.

Cold, stony walls. I sat on them today, pale winter, with him.

"Am I pretty?"

A question I knew the answer to, but I still twirled loose strands of my hair between my index and thumb.

"The prettiest. Do you need to ask, honestly?"

"She's pretty too." My chin gestured towards someone I barely took notice of apart from her gender.

"Not like you."

Fruitless task, this conversation. Why do we do it every day then? Do we exist purely out of habit?

Nauseating thoughts. I allowed myself in this instant to lash out at him, and I suppose he will never know why.

"I told you, I don't think she's pretty..."

I shut the door behind me as if were any other day. Backpack heavily stuffed with clothes and my medicines and bank statements and probably old cartons I'd forgotten to throw away from months back. I sighed; I could have at least bothered to clear it out before my brash move

towards the doorknob.

He was sleeping, of course, and even if he wasn't he would not think much of it.

He'd mistake it for routine, you see.

Daily reach towards my cup of Java, head towards work, then more coffee but with the frothy kinda stuff on top which cost a few extra bucks, but the lighting at the place was cool. "Ambient." I'd pour my staccato thoughts into the golden lit space while pouring heavy creamed coffee down my throat. Then I'd come home and sleep with him, and then sleep without him.

It was routine, and he'd mistake today for that too.

Wasn't coming back today, nor did I know where I was going. Just knew that I couldn't see him, this, my reflection, as long as I was stuck here.

He was kind. I love him, truly I do, but something is missing in me.

Good bye, and good morning, Simon.

Cold air. Wide fields of grass and damp dandelions. Azure sky.

Lit orange dancing among the still wet air. Moth searching for its moon.

My heart wasn't heavy. I stopped feeling loss a long time ago. It was pretty empty, actually, but a bit of it still longed to belong.

Somewhere, anywhere, but here. And there.

... And here.

You don't know just how many empty evenings.

I look up at you slyly. You watch, expressionless.

I giggle, queen of coquetry. I ask him if he wants me to put on a new face, disappear.

More orange as the blade heats. I can't see my reflection against it anymore.

The room was bathed in the golden hue of sunset that day.

AFTERWORD

Today's story was forwarded to us by a nice man who gives us movie tickets. He claimed it was by his friend and he asked me to take a look to see if we could run it. I gave him a pleasant "yes" and cheerfully forgot all about it. After a reminder or two I did take a look at the submission and here we are.

I quite like "This Song is About..." because it manages to suggest a fair amount without actually making it explicit. The character's thoughts are presented superficially and it's up

to the reader to decide why she thinks the way she does, and what the actual motivations behind her actions are. I personally think the character may be slightly mad; I do not know what the writer intended. This sort of vagueness is hard to make work but that has been achieved here. The descriptive nature of the narrative is not something to my taste, but I know many of our readers enjoy that style. However I will say that (especially in the first few paragraphs) the narrative got bogged

down in descriptions without advancing the plot sufficiently. A leaner approach to narration would have served the story better, in my opinion.

I had initially concluded that the nice man with tickets had written the story himself. I quite enjoyed that idea, until the writer came to our offices and asked about the story and ruined my little fantasy.

– Zoheb Mashiur, Sub-editor, SHOUT