



The Melting Waltz

TABEYA A. AZDASIH

I think there must be a song for this weather.

The wind is making the curtains bellow and the sky looks like a Rémond painting. You would almost be jealous of him had you not mastered the curves and slopes of our bodies already. It seems the man grabbed a canvas full of sky, real sky. There are mourning doves singing, but then again there are always mourning doves singing these days.

Each day they follow me around, weeping with their voices so heavy my shoulders droop under the weight. I fill myself to the brim. I don't wear shoes anymore, only sandals. Only clothes with no pockets. Nowhere for their sorrow to burrow, to fester, to *live*. But it seems I have an emptiness inside my body. Shortness of breath and only when the birds are around – absolutely no space inside me.

Their voices color me. A greyish blue tint under my skin, the sound of them filling me to the brim – threatening to spill out of my eyes, my hands, my mouth. My hair never dries, wet with the feel of it, thick as blood. I wake up with feathers between my legs. The birds, the birds, they take almost everything. Like all cruel things, they leave you only with crumbs of what you once had, so as to never let you forget.

The dead convent still bears its cross, half eaten by the locusts that have been swarming our town for about a week now.

They do this every year, only to feed on the cross and whisper to the locals.

They work hard to ignore the insects, covering their mouths and ears with their hands but they need more hands to keep them out of their ears, their minds, and their divine business. The faith of this town has melted – I cannot explain it – like a candle, its body stained with wax, thicker in some places, only a shadow of what it once was. The people who seem to need it keep lighting it on fire, and the wax melts. I suppose our prayers are being carried off by the locusts.

The town is bloated with the smell of rot and decay.

The more things change though, the more they stay the same.

The cheerleaders still wave the ends of their smoldering orange cigarettes at the edge of the forest. Frogs still croak in the middle of the day, so much so that they have become a comforting background hum. The ground vibrates as the boys speed through and around the town in their motor cycles, vowing to leave, driving in circles. We all walk in circles.

You took to the air to escape. I can still feel you around me. My mother looks at me with fear in her eyes.

Have you been speaking to her too? I've been looking for an escape from you too, you are the air that I breathe, I breathe in circles and only one breath that reeks of you and your rot – once in, once out. Natural and simple.

Destined.

VIOLET

HUMAIRA BAKHTIAR

I'm breathing,
but I'm not alive.
I'm hearing,
but I'm not listening.
I'm touching,
but I'm not feeling.
I'm seeing,
but I'm not focusing.
Everything around me is moving so fast.
The sun goes in, the moon comes out.
The moon goes in, the sun comes out.
Yet I never feel the difference.
Everyone is moving so fast.
It feels like I'm in a time-lapse.
Everyone is moving on.
Moving forward.
But I'm standing,
Alone,
Not moving an inch.
Everything is so grey,
so black,
so white.
Where is the red?
Where is the blue?
Where are the colours?
Where are you?
I feel alone.
I feel defeated.
I feel vulnerable.
Where are you?
Life seemed so promising.
Life seemed so beautiful.
But all of a sudden,
Everything was gone.
Why?
I'm fighting it.
I swear I'm fighting it.
But I need help.
I need a hand.
I feel myself,
Falling and falling and falling.
This infinite hole feels so sad.
So blue.
How do I fight it?
How do I climb out,
When there is nothing to climb up with.
No wall, no support, no anything.
Where are you?
Where are you?
I need you.
Then maybe,
I could be breathing
and be alive.
I could be hearing
and actually listen.
I could be touching
and really feel.
I could be seeing
and be able to focus.
Then there you were.
Giving me your hand,
Picking me up.
And once I was out,
I saw you.
And it was me.