

Dark.
Dusky.
Dirty.



WORDS & ILLUSTRATION: NUZHAT SHAMA

Her sister had the lion's share,
Just for her skin, oh so fair.
For her veins not branching to blue—
Her melanin was repulsive to you.
She wished her skin would grow anew,
While she took up the bristles concealed,
In hopes of scrubbing away the soot,
And rinsing away skin so rusted,
To solve all her problems to the root.
Only to face misery raw and unsorted.
Her existence and thoughts eventually mute.

Penumbra

NUSHRAT NAIMA

All these unsent letters piling up on my desk
I know you'll never read them
Yet, some part of me wishes that you would.
How do you send letters to a place with no address?
Howbeit I'll write on till my pens run out of ink
And my system runs out of caffeine
Hoping
That one day I'll reach you
As my words once used to
Maybe, one day, we'll read them together
When we're no longer blue
Somewhere, someday
I'll tell you about all those stairs I built in my heart
In hopes of reaching you
And maybe you'll laugh at me
As my realist self once did too.



ENIGMA

ZARIN RAYHANA

I awoke with a strangled cry, seeking to bury the host of unwelcome nightmares to the remotest part of my brain. The images were excruciating; the writhing body of a pale girl with dark pink sludge oozing from the fracture in her skull, the stench around her resembling that of rotting meat. Turning on the bedside lamp, I fumbled for the pills my shrink prescribed me and gulped down two at once, feeling the water land onto my hollow stomach.

I couldn't sleep anymore. Calling my concierge and letting him know that I would be out for a few hours, I slipped into a murky boulevard, admiring the quintessence of a midsummer Parisian nocturne. A few feet ahead of me the Seine River flowed gently, illuminated by the

was compact and neat with a jukebox playing jazz music in the background. A rusty iron mirror served as the only decoration in the wall, and as I peeked at myself staring back at me, I realized how much I had changed in the past few years of being alone. If I'd gone to a club, they would have probably dismissed me as a long lost member of The Beatles – moptop brown hair and a thin fuzz of stubble I'd forgotten to shave since I'd arrived in Paris. Tearing my eyes away from the weary version of myself, I finished eating my pizza and ambled back to the alley that leads to my run-down hotel.

"Monsieur, there is someone here to meet you," the concierge said as soon as I passed the reception.

I frowned at him, unable to fathom who would want to meet



garish yellow lights of outlying houses and the few boats that cruised at this time of the night. In the distance a gramophone was playing and the mellifluous tune floated over the water. I sheered away as the recurrent nightmares attempted to etch on my mind, staring unseeingly at the picturesque view in a stupor. Shadows lengthened around me as the lights began to go down. After a few more minutes of aimlessly dawdling around, I bought a few slices of pizza and ice water from one of those tiny storefront places that depended on night owls of the city to survive. The ambience

me at this time. I knew nobody else in Paris other than my guide, and my mother's old friend who had invited me over last night. The guest rose from the sofa as soon as the concierge had pointed him to me – a middle aged, sophisticated-looking man clad in business attire. It was hard to maintain a straight face since I recognized him from nowhere. He walked over carefully, as if expecting me to react a certain way and then extended his hands, catching me in an act of surprise.

"Congratulations for having solved the puzzle," he whispered almost inaudibly, "Welcome to Cicada 3301."