

Where do leopards go when forests burn?

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When fires hold the earth captive and the trees grow alive
dancing
Like fiery beacons,
Singeing the earth's alchemy
And turning its story, its past, its bones into uneven lines of
ash,
What do the leopards do?
Do mobs of bats lift them up and drop them off to some-
place safe?
Do they run and run fast until they have no legs –
Until their tails catch fire?
Do they roar till their voices are snatched by fiery birds and
hoolock gibbons?

Or do they grow wings
And fly through the air choked with smoke
To the smog-veiled sun –
A pirate-eye in the sky;
As the fiery trees keep dancing and dying,
Dying and dancing –
Their phantoms up in the air,
Spreading their ancient, spaghetti branches
To comfort the leopards in flight?



Unrequited Love

TABASSUM HASNAT

"What brings out your strongest and frailest version out of yourself?"

"Unrequited love," I replied, indifferent to the fact that we are almost sitting closely beside each other, our shoulders almost touching.

"Does it bring your best and worst out of you too?"

"Yes, it does."

I could see confusion etched across your face, a sparkle of curiosity in your eyes.

"You see, unrequited love awakens a potential in your soul to live through every day and night without the one you love, it gives you a newfound courage to carry the remnants of your shattered heart and dreams everyday with a smile on your face. It teaches you a lesson to accept certain things the way they are, and removes regret from your broken heart."

"Then how does it make you weak?"

I could feel my smile fading away as your question starts to settle in...

"You know, you can put up a front and shield yourself from every agonising sound your heart makes as it shatters right inside your ribcage, between your lungs. But for how long? When every single thing keeps weighing you down, your shield breaks just like your heart and there it is, your frailest and worst part out of you."

Exhaling a sigh, I see you staring down on the sand below our feet. "It isn't easy to let go of the pieces of your heart that had been once decorated to give it to someone else. It isn't easy to accept that the one you love doesn't even care to love you back. It isn't easy to see the person you love becoming a distant and unrealised dream. That's when unrequited love makes you vulnerable and..."

"I never knew my dumb friend would know so much about love."

Even in the dim lit ambience I could see the faint smile playing on your lips. And I also noticed how you didn't mention the word best before friend.

"I don't know about love, I just somehow know about the unrequited one."

"And I know only about love!" you said and laughed it off like you always did. Because you really do only know about love, about the love you harbor for her. Whereas I only know about the love that I once had, maybe still have for you, the love that became my strength and weakness simultaneously.

Closing my eyes for a second, realising life is too short yet too long to be at a war with oneself, I let this unrequited love to crush and build me once again.

Letting every cracking sound of my heart hit me then burying the sounds deep in my soul again, I exhaled a puff of air and smiled, "So how's your love life going?"