

UNTITLED ENVIRONMENTAL DISASTER

AZMIN AZRAN

The chilly winds of early November
Or the lack thereof,
The haze in the air and the dust in my breath,
Hear my stifled cough.

Your tall buildings and your fast moving cars –
The day's tech is a marvel.
Mother Earth's grave is on Earth itself
And on that grave you build hell.

I pretend I know green, when my child never will,
Colours fade into a repressive grey.
There's so much wrong, so much to fix,
No time, I cry, and I blow smoke away.

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PHOTO: AFP

BURDENED HEARTS

SAMIN SABAH ISLAM

On the night of my wedding I break the ice with my newly wedded husband by telling him about the first man I loved. I tell him how the sides of his eyes would crease when his laughter shook the room and how he wanted to name our first born child either after his late grandmother, or 'Zaraf', depending on the gender.

"He married someone else now, has two sons and a daughter. A day doesn't go by when I don't dream about him," I admit.

I search his eyes for sadness or bewilderment or fiery rage, any emotion at all, but his impassive gaze challenges me to press further, to reveal more. I don't.

He begins now, telling me about this dream of a woman. He tells me how he only saw her cry once and how woefully his heart ached at the sight. He tells me that it was that exact moment when he vowed to never let melancholy overcome her charcoal eyes ever again. And he didn't. She hadn't known sadness till the day darkness overtook her. He tells me he hadn't yet learned to live in a world without her.

I forget the provenance of my sorrow. Do I grieve the man who left me behind or does my heart cry for a dream of a woman and the man who can't fathom life without her?

We sit there now, open, bare, defenceless.

I lose count of how many minutes pass till the clearing of his throat awakens me from a painful reverie.

"My mom would like it if you made tea tomorrow morning maybe, for the family. If you're okay with it," he whispers. Hesitation clings to every breath he exhales.

I nod, agreeing.

"I don't usually drink tea," he informs.

Deciding to break my silence, I whisper, "I'm told I make very good coffee, such that you'd fall in love with it."

"By whom?" he blurts, and regrets it as fast as he asked.

I smile at him weekly, not offended, just, saddened.

"Coffee for you and tea for the family then."

His smile doesn't quite reach his eyes. It's a start, I tell myself.

"I'll freshen up," I whisper, at an attempt to move away from whatever moment we just shared.

He calls out one last time, more to the darkness of the night than to me.

"Zaraf Ahmed. Sounds good," he tests it out by adding his surname.

For a split second, an alien emotion overpowers my despair.

My eyes refuse to meet his and a lone tear grazes my cheek.

