



If There Were More Hours in the Day

WAZIHA AZIZ

Cool winter winds
Carry stories untold
Through cracks in my curtains.
A quiet lovers' quarrel,
A sleeplessly sobbing child.
The low hum of television static
Mera jeevan toh hai tera saaya.

Clocks tick in homes asleep.
Plates clink at late dinners and
Shutters close as shop-
Keepers lock up before
Turning in.
Neighbourhood *chachas* walk
The cemented pavement,
An unfinished pack of death sticks in hand.
The blare of sudden Toyotas intrudes
Into the perpetual hush.
The nocturnal own these streets now.

A blanketing fog dismembers
The neighbourhood as I lay beneath
Blankets of my own but
I am one with it all
The same and this winter,
If there were more hours in the day
I'd spend them wishing
For less.

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Ramen Overnight

MAISHA NAZIFA KAMAL

I believe recipes have stories in them.

You don't know how far the smell of sizzling crushed cumin has drifted to. You don't know what the whiff of freshly brewed coffee makes you remember. A slowly reduced sauce leaves behind not just red stains on your fingertips, but something else as well.

Aftertastes have afterthoughts. And afterthoughts have aftermaths.

Read in between the lines.

A huge chunk of beef is bathed in the tanginess of vinegar and citrus.

The cleansing.

The cupboard creaks open and there are rows of jars of spices. They make their own concoction, a burst of fireworks of colors, chased with intervals of spoons of water. A paste that coats the beef and treacherously seeps into it.

Adding layers, nuances.

Put a pot on heat where more spices culminate in a pool of chicken stock. Few squirts of lime and some drizzles of soy sauce can totally change the game. Sprinkle salt and pepper as per your taste or mood. You decide. You get to be the writer, orchestrator, the director, the brain. You decide how much you can temper this.

The noodles have been soaked and drowned. They are now tossed into the slow-cooked broth where they swirl and dance. A nonchalant toss of blocks of tofu and onions have more leverage than one can think. Boil it up and simmer it down. Dice up sweet looking red chilies and spring onions for later. Boil an egg to your preference and cut them open.

The beef. You forgot where you started. Everything is all over the place, over-whelming, but you can fix this. Take the beef out of its sanctuary. The oil is heated, and the pieces of beef carefully join in. The smoke is the threshold, either you can burn it or you could get away with it. The skin on the

beef is just the perfect color, you turn off the heat and the temptation is giddy but the noodles wait.

Everything now has to be in place. The hot pot slightly burns off the flesh of your palms but it's okay. The beautiful bowl you picked up from an antique store will finally be taken off from its shelf of dust. It will look deserved and worthy now as you slowly pour in the broth and noodles and give them a good mix. Balance the generous portions of beef and bean sprout on top of it. The halves of the egg at the side will not only look good in terms of presentation but also double the flavor you packed in. The diced chilies and spring onions will loyally serve as great condiments. Everything is assembled.

I take a look at my dilapidated kitchen. Through the small stub of a window where the ombre of hues of sunrise, that had melted away the void night, peeks in. I take a look at my tainted hands under the cold spill of water of the kitchen sink. How the hard work of everything is washed away, cleaned to ground zero. I take the bowl of steaming ramen in my hands. I can never tell in mere numbers how much time it took me to make it, to carefully craft everything layer by layer, detail by detail as per my own recipe till I could call it mine. It was the melting of thoughts, echoes and choices from one form to another that could come close to tracing the time it took me to make my own art.

Nobody was able to knock over anything into this. Nobody else had a say in this except me. It wasn't anyone else's craft. It wasn't made to cater to anyone's taste but mine.

This deeply woven tangle of ramen, cooked overnight, was only mine.

Maisha Nazifa Kamal has lost track of time and is living in a world where she never existed. Break her reverie at 01shreshtha7@gmail.com

