

# SIRENS

A.M. FAHAD

Summer is unkind. As a cruel seething sun slowly consumes the heart of the city in its heat, the sweat on your chin finds itself evaporating before it can fall to the hot floor of a motionless bus. And before you can release the weight of the world on the floor upon reaching home, A wind brushes past the nape of your neck and sends a warning of sorts, as all the lights of the house flicker and fade away in a singular sweeping motion. This is a love story set in darkness. Away from the car horns, the blaring street lights and neon signs. Here exists an evanescent you, and a transient, fleeting me. You see, this city is destined to die, with all its smallness in the vast scheme of things. I think love is a hackneyed word, one nuclear flick away from the tyrants with their teeth soaked in blood and their figurative buttons of oblivion. A final point of human failure. But before we reach that point in time, do you not want to see how this story ends? Where your arms are crossed into mine, and mine into yours. I would like to see how the flickering of light from the candles forms reflections on your eyes. Show me how you smile—how your eyes give off the sadness of an ocean before warming up to a tender ray of light. Tell me how the mother cat from work plans on raising her fur devils with the current state of the economy—or if it is somehow possible to sneak in a pack of ramen in our bag of groceries. Show me where you struggle to swallow the gulp in your throat, when the gazes of a hundred thousand insects in the streets suffocate you. In truth, our lives are not so different from these candles. We are fickle creatures. And I cannot assure you of a future. But this cursed city pulsates with an enormous longing for life. I also would like to be no different, and hold onto you. I would like to believe that our lives are more than the flicking of buttons, our bodies—more than hollow flesh and bones.

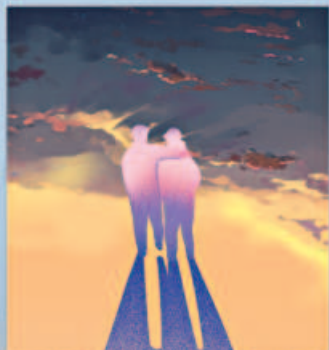


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## The Faceless Old Woman Who Secretly Lives in your House

ADRITA ZAIMA ISLAM

I am not the faceless old woman who secretly lives in your house.

There are no words exchanged, there is no mysticism, there is no wind in the twisted, contorted corridors of this vast, small, empty, breathless, sad place.

If they knew, your mother would have said, "It's in your head, darling," and your father would have screamed, "Put that head in the toilet bowl where it belongs."

Except your father never screamed and your mother never spoke.

Because it's all in your head, at the end of the day.

Even this house, with its every surface covered in your endless scribbles and its very essence bearing the impossible weight of your feather-like soul—

Don't you know by now that it's in your head, my love? Don't you know that the house is only floating in space and time, suspended by the invisible cables hooked to your head, my love?

I am not the faceless old woman who secretly lives in your house.

Because your house doesn't exist and hasn't since the day you buried me.

The dirt flowed out of your hand without resistance that day.

You coated the slick blackness of my coffin in record time, pressuring my body into submission and pulverising my soul until it came to no longer exist.

Except it existed but it was only in your head.

Don't you remember that day, my love? When the dirt was stuck under your fingers, and the blood coloured your lovely pale face crimson, and you scrubbed and scrubbed your hands under the cold of the running water till they became raw.

Don't you remember the day when the emptiness of your home became a deafening din and changed it into a house, my love?

No, I am not the faceless old woman who secretly lives in your house.

No matter how much you want it to be me.

And it's not your mother and it's not your high-school English teacher with her cute pumps and it's not the pretty cashier at the departmental store that you flirted with on the day you left me.

No, my love, it's none of us who haunt these desolate, depraved, ruthless, quiet, barbaric corridors.

My love, don't you know that it's the ghosts of your blank soul packed with its queue of memories of anger and jealousies and regrets that inhabit this treacherous house?

Don't you know that you are the faceless old woman who secretly lives in your own house, my love?

Don't you know?