

Adrita Saha, 14, Afterglow

afterglow

/ˈɑːftəɡləʊ/

(n.) light or radiance remaining in the sky after the sun has set.

This is a story of letting go, of the end, but also the glow of the beginning. It's a story of the stillness of after hours.

Let's begin, shall we?

We'll start after the hours of sunlight, under the mellow light of the moon. It's eerily quiet, small stores empty, roads silent and nothing but the scrape of our shoes against the footpath. The stars are slowly illuminating the world below them, heavenly deities casting light upon a broad expanse of darkness. A night of broken starlight.

"And then the protagonist had like all the cool explosions around her like *wham!*" You gesticulate wildly, hands flapping like some ridiculous inflatable tube man. I fix my scarf, grumbling.

"*Wham?* Wouldn't it be more like *boom?*" I whisper angrily against the wind. You pause to ponder for a moment.

"Okay then! *Boom!*"

Continuing to disrupt the other-worldly balance of silence and stillness, we continued on our brisk walk. It's the last one, after all.

I, even now, will never be fully ready to experience the total immersion into nature whenever we go on these walks— the way the scent of distant jasmine tickles my nose or the slight whistle of the wind, winding around corners, breathing gently.

We round a bend to find a bench, aged paint peeling off at the edges, wood rotting in a corner - yet a refuge for now.

We sit. I sigh.

It's the last time - of us strolling after the hours of hubbub have disappeared. It's hard to contemplate it now.

"I'll—" You stop, mid sentence. "I'll miss you," you say, so incredibly quiet, silver pin-pricks in your eyes as you look right at me, hidden like lightning in an expanse of clouds.

The world stills, and your arms find their way around me.

I cry, tears pushing their way out from where I had shoved them down for so long. Both of our bodies shivering in tandem, being rocked by the onslaught of hiccups, hearts dancing to a song inside us.

And slowly, I let go.

You lift your head to look at me, the slightest hint of pink in your eyes like the last bits of sunlight's paintbrush on an evening sky. A small, sad smile graces your lips. I smile back, *because there's almost no time left.*

—

you bade me goodbye after all those hours

tears clinging to your lashes

so delicately

*voice breaking as you whisper
for the whole world to hear
"I'll be waiting."*

*as i nod without hesitation
for this is beginning
and not the end*

"I know."

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