

SATSUMA

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OPEN BOOK UNBOUND WRITING

The summer still had not turned into an empirical experiment of death tolls, it was still a quiet quagmire of simple signposting that youth is inevitably wasted on inebriated young adults, too far gone to appreciate a 9:28PM sunset from Calton Hill. Or, the July sky which had turned into hues of supper – salmon pink, rhubarb sun, moon the size of a freshly baked *khamiri*, the stars around it, sesame dust.

The wind trying its best to fling us into the sea.

Now, in retrospect, I think if the sky wants to surprise you, let it.

Summer splashes with terrible ease on cobbled Lothian roads and as liquid miracles in crystal glassware. The gorse at the Salisbury Crags transport me back to the Delhi of my memories and how the whole of NCR glittered when the golden weeping *amaltas* greeted us. I could see the big one, the one which looked like a chandelier, bang in the middle of our red college campus, and the series of them opposite Siri Fort where we used to go for evening swims. The road lined with swinging laburnum, the smell of *khatta paani* from our post-workout grubbing, your clavicles catching the last of the chlorine water as you violently shook your hair for drying.

In Edinburgh, it always rains. My jet-black hair is mostly glistening.

Sometimes, if a city wants to surprise you, let it.

Then leave it.

On the escalator at Waverley Station, I catch a silent glint of you.

A young mother in front of me is peeling satsumas for her boy.

Over a smog-addled Delhi dusk, you had taught me the difference between the many weans of the citrus family. Which ones waft best in bakeries – the mandarin. Clementine is sweeter. Satsuma is the easiest to peel.

Then you proceeded to teach me how to peel off skin better.

We descended the steep stairs of the Kashmere Gate metro station, your hands sweetened with rumours of yesteryears – in Japan eating satsumas without seeds made you prone to infertility. “But they hardly have seeds,” I giggled. “Precisely why one must be picky,” you confirmed confidently.

In my small town, oranges were simply of one kind, the ones brought in from Darjeeling. After coming to Delhi and being exposed to the exponential excess of options available in the market, the word satsuma became a word on body-wash bottles. Prior to your presence, the word meant skincare or lather in plastic packaging; a frothy aroma, soap bubbles. Two of us in the shower; getting bruises all over our thighs because you were always so callous about where the ancient tap croaked and bumped me into it despite my mouth open in all kinds of agony. Complaints had begun to take shape in pH levels, but my bubble of thought usually precipitated with the rest of our muck.

The Scott Monument in Edinburgh always reminded me of our time at the Mutiny Memorial near Kashmere Gate. The second Lothian relic in that part of Delhi where you could see trains zooming in and out of Red Fort walls. The first relic is the Lothian cemetery where the heartbroken headless Nick roams – I found it fitting because Delhi has a habit of running me down with old ghosts. We were going to our regular haunt that day, to eat *laphing* from

Tenzing Aunty and wash it down with the sickly-sweet fruit beer you loved so much. I just *loved* your tongue sweet; I was ever only truly greedy when it came to you. The mungbean had done wonders to our little adventure across the Violet - C.Sec - Yellow metro lines.

It rained, remember?

There were seeds in the satsuma and sesame in the cold noodles.

Bellyfull, I had come home that day & looked the word up - satsuma. Also, meant snails. Your leg snailing on my back, my hands snailing your morning hair, your study table littered with empty Heinekens snailing into an unproductive, beer-dunked weekend. We were agonizingly slow when we came together, and slower when we had to give it all up.

We were snails, you and I.

We were mandarins.

Soap bubbles.

Silky skin.

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