



### The art of waiting

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Kamal chooses an empty corner of the floor on the far end and sits down. He doesn't know how long he will have to be here for - they won't tell him. He stows away his bundle behind him and places his blanket on top of it. Then he places his transistor over the blanket.

The air feels stiff, smelling of cheap cologne and thrifty shawls, of stale biscuits and mold. Every now and then, the wind waltzes in, whispering sweet nothings and luring away the warmth. There is a continuous buzz at the counter, interspersed with a "Get out. No men allowed" from the guard at regular intervals. He can hear muffled voices in the distance, some angry, some placating, some wailing, some hushed. He tries to tune into one that sounds wiser than the others:

"Patience, Sahib. Patience. This waiting, it's an art you have to master. You have to wear your heart on your fluttering sleeve and wait, till waiting comes as naturally to you as breathing. It is here, in this interlude, in this silence, when we are reminded of what we are and what we can be, that we are really human."

The sky over this part of the city is different. It is painted with the yearnings of the

listless, the wailing to the Almighty of those who once swore there was none. The cinder of broken lives can be seen blending with the orange sunset of the tomorrows that linger at its edges. Here, the clouds are the color of grief and heartache, etched in soft graphite.

Kamal is drifting downwards, deep enough to not see a trace of light. The indigo water is swirling around him. Owing him. Crushing him. The darkness now threatens to swallow him whole. He clutches desperately at the thin liquid, thrashing and flailing wildly. His legs are tired of trying to bring him to the surface. His lungs are aflame, ready to burst. His throat is searing in agony. Every atom of his body is drowning. The water closes in on him.

"Kamal Kumar, Kamal Kumar", blares from the speakers. With sleep lingering on his heavy eyelids, he stumbles to the reception. He peers into the doctor's eyes; more plastic than the clipboard she is tapping on. He can feel the water level rising again. "Your wife's lungs are filling up with fluid. We need to take her to the ICU".

He nods, desperately hunting for an ounce of hope in her words, to hastily plant it, nurture it. To believe in it. He signs on the

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paper she thrusts at him.

A startling rumble rings loudly. The heavens are rolling with ashen clouds, like out of a volcano. Drunk on impatience, he decides to go out. He walks through the stuffy corridor that has an undertone of bleach. The walls are scraped in places from hundreds of trolleys bumping into them. They were painted once, he can tell that from the cream flakes that remain. A bulb hanging from the ceiling bathes the alley with ivory yellow light.

Outside, the rain has become a living fabric. Something you can reach your hand through and let your fingers play in. The street lights shine feebly into the perpetual twilight. He passes by trees lining the sidewalk. They look as old as the stories they have been witness to. The rain falls silently on Kamal's tired fingers. Thin streams from the sky meet those flowing

seamlessly from his longing eyes. There are the drums of ambulances, the cymbals of feet on the concrete footpath. The mellow chime of leaves rustling through the chaos accompanies a choir of lights and horns from passing traffic singing in infinite patterns. He is serenaded by a medley of blues and reds and black.

He yearns for the monotony that was once his life. He misses the comfort disguised as routine. He misses his wife making him tea with just enough milk to match the color of his palms. He misses the exactly three biscuits kept alongside. He craves a silence away from *this* silence, one that isn't so deafeningly loud.

Kamal returns indoors to sit staring at the rusty brown stain by the side of his bundle. He sits for a long time. He sits until someone taps him on the shoulder and tells him, "Congratulations, it's a boy".