

Letters to Joanne

By Nilesh Mondal

Letters to Joanne #1

A poet died in North Kolkata yesterday.

21 years of existence

Half shrugged in other character's lives,

Half hugged in stagedust from 32 re-readings of his desperation,

He chose to end his own yesterday.

The cold metal bench of the metro I take

From Shyambazar,

Smells to me of death.

I didn't know the poet.

I never met him. We never shook hands.

But I carry his memories around.

Some in the way my grandmother strokes my hair.

Some in the way I sip my tea.

Joanne, your city dies everyday too

In every new memory we make.

We have walked till our ankles hurt

And you have broken your slipper strap already.

Joanne, today we won't walk anymore.

Today we shall gather together and breathe
In each other.

We shall gather at the end of a darker evening
With smoke rings and laughter sprinkling
The grass,
And you will play with your fire.
I'll ask you not to.
I'll tell you I'm afraid of the flame.
Joanne, I've revelled in the wake of a thousand pyres once,
And all I've seen is you.

It's already my last day in your city,
And I still feel the warmth of hands
Those have touched the tram ticket
Before it reached me.
By the ghat we dust this city's fairy dust
From our hair.
Joanne, your city still doesn't want to let you go.

On the way to Bagbaazar, you teach me
How to decipher your city.
"That there, is Star Theatre."
And I'm reminded of the actor
Who didn't want to die, but never got to live either.

You said you'd been to the cemetery.

Where your favourite writer now rests.

Joanne, I've seen cheap suggestion papers of his words now.

My memories shall fade

After a week or two.

We'll meet again, maybe

And this time, I'll talk of happier things.

Joanne, it'll still be okay

If we meet a hundred years later.

By then, my city would have a road without potholes.

Joanne, our river, won't be flowing through the same ghat.

And our ghat would be someone else's apartment.

Letters to Joanne #2

At 11.40 today, we meet beside our river again.

It has been 2 days since our river woke up.

And the trembling that shook our ghat

Has slipped into our clasped hands now.

You always said death is beautiful when it is close enough.

To your surprise, you witness

Jahaji bhai, with tears behind his towel folds

For an unknown kid, in Nepal.

And prayers to his Allah

For every uneventful morning.

When the land beneath us shook

It was your hands I held.

I, like the river, who never fears to die

But trembles at the thought

Of touching another ghat, as I flow.

Your touch still erupts in colourful volcanoes. And leaves me scarred

With a pain that is not my own.

There are letters waiting for my touch, back home.

And you say, if you want to write, write with your fingers dipped in your soul.

Write because I don't care whether it's 3 at night or my sides hurt from remembering you for too long,

But I'll wait for your excuse

To walk through Shovabazar, in the rains.

It's a surprise we have spent our evenings

Counting boats, but not drowning

Every time the river ate its shore.

It's a surprise we haven't

Hated each other always.

Joanne, your city is a wreck of a thousand impure thoughts now.

And I'm worried, when I find you again

You'd be dreaming, of me.