

Banquet

When I open the door, the fresh air soothes my cheeks. Shaking, I enter the balcony and let myself fall onto a grey chair that used to be white once. I lift my head and look into the sky. Here, walls and ceilings are non-existent. Only the railing surrounds me, its rods are protecting me from the height. They let the summer breeze through and I feel it caressing my skin. I close my eyes. Now, black suits surround me. I follow the coffin in which your body lies. My feet are moving my body, directing it through the graveyard, while I am blinded by tears. I open my eyes again. Dark clouds hang above the green avenue in front of our home. The summer breeze flows through the gowns of the lime trees lining the street. It looks like it is going to rain. I stretch out my bare arm and expect to feel some drops. But there are none.

My face turns to the living room. Women and men, dressed more darkly than the clouds could ever be, sit at the table. Eating heavily, drinking heavily and remaining silent. A black frame presses them together, each black spot is glued to its own place. Watching that frame makes my stomach ache. I stare at the sky again and sigh. It feels like burning flames are licking my guts. The ache seems to suck all the blood out of my face and limbs. The only thing working properly is my heart. I feel it pumping against my sickness. What did you feel the moment yours stopped?

I inhale the summer air deeply in an attempt to ease my mind. I barely notice how the balcony door opens. He steps onto the green carpet that is spread over the ground. Its gaudy colour fails at imitating grass. The carpet lacks leaves, I think, and bugs to sit on them. My cousin sits down on the second chair, which is covered with unremovable grey spots. He takes out a cigarette and lights it. His black shoes are pointing in my direction. He leans forward and rests his elbows on his knees. I watch how my cousin's lips suck the white roll, allowing the nicotine to enter his body and flow through his veins. He bows his head and releases the stress through his mouth. I take a look at my arms and notice that they are still shaking. The cigarette does not seem unpleasant to me.

My cousin lifts his head and looks at me. "The fresh air feels good, doesn't it?" he says. His words sound familiar but my mind translates the message only slowly. Eventually, I nod, powerlessly. "I can't wait until the banquet's over," I whisper. I expect my cousin to smirk at me in agreement. Instead, he moves closer to me and touches my shoulder. We do not move for a while. A bird's singing fills the silence.

My cousin seeks a more comfortable position and leans back in his chair. Hot ash is falling from his cigarette and burns tiny holes into the carpet beneath our feet. I take a look beyond the railing. I watch the summer breeze climb into the green lime trees' gowns. It is shaking up some leaves but the pigeons do not seem to mind. Gently, they coo and remain still on their branches. Do you remember how the birds' voices woke us on weekends? And then we used to observe them and we imagined climbing on the rooftop and jumping over to them. The wind would carry us, softly, like it carries the birds. But now you are gone. I look at my cousin, who is still smoking. The blurry smoke partly covers his face. He seems to be lost in his thoughts as much as I am. I glance at the living room. The frame has not moved. My mind is forming a sudden wish. I want to stay on this balcony forever. Talking, smoking and daydreaming. Maybe smirking. I turn to my cousin. What would he say if told him what was on my mind?

My cousin moves again. He gets up from his greyed chair and straightens up. After his lungs have consumed all of the nicotine from the cigarette, he puts it out. The cigarette butt lights up for a moment. Then it fades away in the ashtray and leaves a grey little pile. My cousin leaves the balcony without sharing another word. I watch him enter the living room and move towards the banquet. He takes his seat in the portrait. Elegantly, his body adjusts to the black frame. As I take a closer look, my eyes are desperately seeking for my cousin's consoling shape. But I cannot recognise him anymore. Some of the people are still drinking. Black sleeves reach for glasses. Mouths sip from drinks, hesitating. But the eating has stopped. The tablecloth is not covered with dishes anymore. It seems like the banquet is almost over.

The cleared table urges me to go inside. I should at least shake some hands and embrace some relatives before they leave. Yet I refuse to follow my cousin. I am glued to my chair, unable to move. While the sky gets darker, the birds are seeking shelter. I notice how their small bodies make the leaves rustle. Immediately, I miss their singing voices. Their melodies allowed me to reminisce about the stories you used to tell. I recall one hot summer day. We went outside and lay down on the cool earth. Leaves of grass left prints on our soft skin. You could imagine the wildest adventures. And I would listen with excitement. I remember your lips were so close to my ears, I felt your warm breath inside them. How I would love to hear one of your stories again. But I cannot relive them now. The cool air makes my body shiver. I long for the summer breeze to still soothe me. But all I sense is the harsh wind forcing me to move my limbs. I get up and peer through the window into the living room. Shadows are floating on the floor in the dim light. My shadow is going to join them. My head turns in order to take a last glance at the empty chairs. The way they stand there unsettles me.

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