

Oh Sleep! You Gentle Thing

(first draft)

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One, two, three... Four nights after the day Moromi, while she was being made love to, disclosed to Q that she does not love him anymore, and once he helps himself to orgasm and goes down on her to clean up his cum, he can leave and walk away from her life, called Q to say she is having trouble sleeping.

Moromi had thought of it before, the withdrawal symptoms, and knew this irreversible decision would cause her discomfort. She had planned to order from the Naga Tiffin Centre to not miss Q's cooking; she had washed her laundry with Q's shirts to preserve his odour in her fabrics; she had stolen his excessively annotated books and replaced them with the exact editions to have his handwriting, and more importantly, his uninhibited thoughts on measurement problems or retrocausality in quantum mechanics, with her; she had even promoted a male friend to a potential fuck candidate in the events of her longing for semi-mediocre sex. But there was no alternative to Q when it came to making her sleep.

On the first day after separation, she tired herself by walking fourteen thousand steps and cleaning her house; both are separate events. It did not work; she was tired and sleep-deprived the next day when she tried getting drunk. She was unconscious for approximately forty-five years, or so she thought she felt, but it was hardly in the realm of sleep. On the third day, she fucked her newly promoted dick appointment and spent the night in his bed sweating and

agonisingly praying to the god she had killed with the heel of her shoe when she was fourteen, “What would I have to give you to let me sleep, you disgraceful lord?”

Q dismissed the thought of not opening the door to Moromi when she called him standing outside, even before it had formulated in his brain. She walked into his house as seamlessly as she walked out of his life. There might have been traces of guilt of exploitation in her heart, but she could deal with it later with another reading of *Giovanni's Room* and an inadequate amount of alcohol. Tonight, she needed the damned sleep. So she sits on the bed. She sees a shadow of Q finishing cleaning the dishes. It is Tuesday; Q has cooked his triple egg ramen marinade; he is very diligent with his meal routines; he loves the taste of vinegar; he also loves M. She thinks he has probably taken a fake sick leave to stay at home and dealt with the grief of losing the object of his desires. She actually thought a lot of things, or maybe not at all. It was difficult to see as she just sat there swimming amidst the sound of running water and chinking plates. The kitchen light went off. But the house was never completely dark. Since Moromi hated pitch darkness, Q thinks she was actually scared of darkness but never admitted that she was, he had installed Fireflies™ (low-watt fairy lights with a sensitive illumination rating) all across the edges of the ceiling. In his house, it is bright enough that he can see her face but not bright enough that he can read what she wrote on the wall when she left him.

Q walked out of the kitchen, and his body replaced the shadow that Moromi was gazing at. He had his heart in his hand or what can be seen as a glass of water that he always insisted M drank before going to bed. She stretched out her hand, took the glass and hydrated her organs who thanked her from their pressure-sensitive cell walls. It is an indescribable state of being when our

bodies are present in the space of comfort. The recognition of a known 'home' conditions a reparation that we need everyday damaging ourselves in the abrasive world. Q pulled out the rose-scented wet wipes from the drawer next to their bed. He skipped the part where he needed to ask if he had the informed consent to hold her face and touch it. That is what he had done when they kissed for the first time. He was insanely insecure then and politely asked M if he could kiss her, to which she obliged. In his bedroom, Q got down on her knee, of course not to propose, to place the piece of clean scented wet tissue on her cheek and moved it under her eyes to her temple and all the way between her brows. As gently as the words he spoke to her, "Have you had dinner?" She did not register his voice as she felt her skin soaking in Q's presence. She dropped herself onto the bed. Q stayed there for a handful of seconds with the tissue in his hand. The wetness of rose extract had been invaded by the leftover mascara from M's eyes along with the salts of dried-up tears. He pocketed the tissue and thought of painting on it later tomorrow when Moromi inevitably leaves him. Or he could burn it slowly each day and convince himself that he will forget his affection or rather the nonsensical devotion for her when it completely turns into ashes. Or he could just masturbate and cum on it. He went through a couple more possibilities of what he could do with that paper museum. When he came out of his mind, he saw Moromi's eyes were looking at him. There was just enough silence in the room that they could hear each other's thoughts.

"My feet hurt."

Q floated over to the long end of the bed and undressed her feet from the hold of two canvas shoes.

“I really miss not having your head rest on my right arm.”

Moromi rolled over to her left and made space for Q to take his place.

“I don’t like this emptiness of quiet. Tell me a story. Make me asleep.”

Q joined her on the bed. He delicately lifted her head, being careful not to pull her hair, and placed his arm underneath her. If one can imagine two dried leaves in the early autumn, just disconnected from their stem, falling down under the spell of gravity with no hurry and in a state of timelessness, glued to each other, touching and not quite touching, were the bodies of Q and Moromi on that bed.

“I think I ...”

Don’t, Moromi spoke out with her eyes closed.

They, when Q and Moromi were ‘they’ and not Q and Moromi, had a routine of sorts. It would begin with Q’s insistence on washing the dishes after meals. He would argue that it is his shower thoughts space where he used to reread Schrödinger in his head and imagine the floating text of his equations on the soiled plates and then scrap it off with warm water. A child’s play, a cerebral solitude deeply entangled with his chores. Moromi could see a rhythm of life in Q’s way of existing. It was so influential that even she could not save herself from it. While Q would be inflicting the liquid soap massacre onto the atomic leftovers of oil and fibres, she would take a notebook and sketch the ‘present’. There’s a condition called synesthesia where people can ‘see’ music. Be it in the form of shapes, colours or any dynamic visual constituents. Moromi, while she would paint the ‘present’, did it with taste. The aftertaste of her dinner, as she felt it with a

battered semi-torn notebook in hand, faded with time, and she raced against time to document these sensations. If she had Mac and Cheese with black coffee and leftover rice, in that order, she would use a brush pen and drain the page with brown to capture the caffeine, which she felt in her mouth odour and also at the edge of her tongue. The warmth and softness of macaroni would be pink and spiral-shaped in M's universe, and at times she would get distracted by the sound of Q washing the dishes, then this event would also invade her present. Sometimes she refused to paint what she felt, like the cold sweetness of a hazelnut pastry she loved to eat but hated to paint, and focused really hard to remember what she wanted to be in her present: a cigarette, peppermint toothpaste, lips of that one woman she kissed in the elevator of her university when she was a sophomore...

The dishes would get clean, and Q would often interrupt Moromi's playdate with time. Her hands would always get messy no matter what M painted. Q would get up and warm the bathtub as Moromi decided what music she wanted to play for when they stop bathing and start making love. The warm water would kiss Moromi's hands and slowly dissociate the pigments of the colour she dreamt of her present with. She would not mind this theft as she lay in the arms of her lover. She especially loved when Q's arms would move on...

"Tell me a story", Moromi spoke again to interrupt Q's dissociating self in his memories as she lay there sleepless on his right arm. Q brought himself into the present to play the role of a momentary personal writer for Moromi. Like the countless times he has done before, Q began his story...

Once upon a time, there were two lovers in this world. They used to live 5000

miles away and have never met each other. They knew they were lovers from the moment they were born. As they grew older they started looking for each other. Unfortunately, there was an impossible curse laid upon them that they would always be 5000 miles away from each other until they saw each other. It was perpetual and endless suffering, as love often is. The lovers would look at the moon, as countless poets had assured them that the beloved would also be looking at it, and longed for each other. They would read out poems to the moon and sing for each other, keeping the celestial light of the moon as a witness. One day the clouds surfaced the moon as they were reading to the moon. And it rained. It rained and rained and rained. It flooded every bit of the earth it could. The people who survived believed that it was the cloud of accumulated tears of those forbidden lovers that could not bear it anymore. Their love and their poems, every word that was hung in the sky, fell down and flooded the world. As the rains touched the two of them, the curse lifted. They were standing on two hills and every other part was beneath the sea of their sorrows. They saw each other, they knew each other, they loved each other and now they lived with each other...

Q would go on and on about the details of how they lived. It was his favourite part. By the time the story reached this point, Moromi was asleep. Profoundly submerged under the tender blanket of her closed eyelids. Moromi liked the premise and conflict more. She would follow each detail that Q made up, and ignored the in-your-face surrealism and the consequent plot holes as they never mattered. It was the world-building that she closely listened to. The images that Q would form, the rules that he would set. It was the same every time, it was also very different every

time. It was a world that surrounded the two of them and it was the two of them that meant the world to this story. Sometimes Moromi would admit, despite her best effort not to reveal, that she loved Q's voice when he would get lost in his own tales.

Once upon a time, there were two lovers. One of them always stayed in the water and the other could never not fly. The bird would zip past the surface of the water looking for its lover and could only see itself in the reflection. The fish would jump out of the water for seconds; breathless and desperate; reaching for the other but only putting itself at risk as other predators would launch themselves at it.
One day...

Q would also hold her body as he told her the stories. His fingers would run from the nape of her neck to sliding down her back and all the way flowing to her waist and down onto the buttocks. It was a parallel story that their bodies told and listened to each other. In between the pauses, when Q would pass by her hand, she would entangle her fingers with his, and they would play a game of their own.

Once upon a time, there were two lovers. They were theatre artists. One was an actor and Two was his voice. They always performed together and the audience would see one and hear another. Although they had great sex every night, the place where they were most intimate was the stage. On the proscenium, under the spotlight, their unity of body and sound would erase all separations of existence until one day...

When M would be really close to her sleep she would take Q's wandering hand tracing her outlines and place it on her breasts and hold it there until the morning. Sleep is the most accurate metaphor for love, Q thought. It is tender, quiet, a doorway to dreams, a temporary death, intimate, vulnerable, puts one off-guard, honest, and conditions the inability to force itself when you desire it the most.

Once upon a time, there was a dream and a memory. The memory told the dream, "I am real and you are not." The dream responded, "Just because you happened does not mean you are real. I am as real as you and as false as you." The memory laughed it out. In your dreams, it said. One day, the memory had a dream and the dream recalled a memory of the memory...

It is still two hours till dawn. When Moromi slept, it was six and a half hours to dawn. Q had looked at her face for a while when she shut her eyes. The two of them, at this infinitesimal instant, are sleeping together. Their faces are ever so close. He takes in the air from her mouth, and she breathes from his exhale. Their lips are as separate as the width of the smallest known particle to the realm of knowledge. A fallen hair from his eyelashes rests on her cheeks. The palm of her hand finds a home on his chest. In this quietness, we will exit the story without making a sound. I need you to pull out the blanket kept at their feet and gently place it upon them. Let there be no sun tomorrow; let there be no tomorrow tomorrow. When a memory dies, it becomes a dream; when a dream dies, it becomes a memory.