

A Boy, A Bench and a Cat

By Rohan Vargas

It all started with a boy, a bench and a cat.

The rain continued to pelt down like the tears of angels onto the monotonously barren landscape of Caelfall, beads of mercury, falling synchronously on the shroud of my black umbrella, that distinctive, mundane pitter-patter. My intense-grey eyes looked pretentiously brighter and lustrous in the moonlight that spilled onto my complexion, giving me a faint titanium-white glow of juvenescence.

In the spotlight of the candescent ebony street-lamp, stood the bench, sadly. “*Sadly*”, such an overused title, quotidian, almost drowning in cliché. Why not melancholy, despair or desolation? Such simplistic, straightforward things should have simplistic titles, they don’t deserve the overly-poetic, grandiloquent titles of other far superior ornate subjects that exist on this earth. The bench, the tiny, inconsequential element of the town, a mere prop, an *illusion* if you’d like to put it that way, only added for the mere convenience it would bring. No greater purpose, no worldly wisdom, a diaphanous figure for the onlookers, and it stays that way.

I was lost in the fluidity of my thought, sagging within the creases of my lemon-coloured raincoat. I felt a sort of emptiness in me, as if a part of me was missing. I couldn’t describe it, it was a tedious feeling, a sort of burden, I only really realised it now that I’m alone. Loneliness.

Something bristly brushed against my legs, subtly. Me being my delusional self I thought I was just being paranoid, over-analyzing my disposition drastically, especially considering I haven’t gotten sleep over the last few days because of exam studying. I crouched, hugging my knees against my chest and peered through the mildewed, mahogany planks of the bench. There was definitely something there, but I couldn’t distinguish what it was straight away since it blended in with the greyish shade of the cobblestones. My eyes could scarcely make out a round-shaped ball, covered in a furry coat.

When it finally curled out into its true form, a weight had been taken off my shoulders, it was only a petty cat. Phew!

It stood in front of me poised and licking its miniature-shaped paws staring back at me coyly, with its head tilted to the side and its roseate tongue lolling out slightly. I couldn’t stop staring at its features, they had a sense of allure to them but it was muted and not overly showy, maintaining its modesty, which is a trait that *everyone* should aspire to have.

I tried not to make eye contact since frankly I wanted it to go away, but no matter what it just kept its fixed gaze at me, those jade resin-like eyes staring into my soul, its ebony and ivory fur still matted by the rain and its silver whiskers faintly glinting with iridescent colours in the moon. Persuading it away with some morsels of scrap noodles didn’t help nor did some raspberry or pistachio macaroons, slowly I was beginning to think that it came here just for me, a predestined fate maybe?

I felt a sense of sympathy for the cat, out here all alone on a bitter winter's night looking for help, it's overly-large compassionate eyes staring back at me. I opened my arms, embracing for impact, thinking the cat would pounce on me suddenly, but no. Instead it limped towards me with languid, tremulous steps and sprawled within the folds of my crossed legs. When I opened my eyes again, it was licking my cheek, smothering it with a slobbery, thick drool, it caressed my hair with its claws but gently and tenderly without hurting me, running its paws through my coiffed waves of bronze-brown.

A smile beamed from both ends of my hollow cheeks. Its fur had a potent smell of hazelnuts and cocoa that shriveled my nose as I hugged it, feeling the swell of its belly against my chest as I did so. Its fur was as cold as the winter wind but gave an indescribable feeling of warmth and sentiment, the kind of warmth you get on your birthday, or meeting a distant friend from primary-school, it's that kind of warmth that kindles in you. It continued to purr contently, laying tranquilly, nestled in the fabric of my vibrant raincoat.

By now it had dozed off, sound asleep. Mom had just texted me that she'd be here soon using her childish font as usual, it was a reflection of her bubbly personality. It was a bittersweet feeling, I didn't want to leave the cat, the feeling ramming up my oesophagus and into my throat, muddling up my words. I placed it in the pastel-pink box of macarons, now empty and makeshift perforations on the side for ventilation. Its dreary eyes stared back at me and up at the stars, twinkling down at us from above.

There was a sudden cacophony of clanging brass and steel as the headlights of Mom's burgundy cooper pierced through the darkness, stopping right at the fountain, nearly obliterating it, typical. She waved at me frantically with an exaggerated enthusiasm. I got in, her still oblivious to what was in that macaroon box.

When we got onto the entwining cobblestone pathways of the countryside, I found my opportunity to tell her, she seemed she was in a good mood, after all Christmas was in a weeks time and I had got her her dream gift, *a deep fat fryer*. I know that sounds ridiculous, but ever since she had me, she always wanted to learn cooking and begin making home-cooked meals for us. Last year was a blender, the year before a crockpot, on her birthday we got her a rotisserie and panini set plus a new set of Teflon pans. Maybe it was her turn to pay me back.

"Mom!"

"Yes? Jonathan?"

"You know the way I've always wanted a pet, ever since I went to the petting zoo in primary?"

"Mhm!"

"Well, for Christmas, I don't want a new guitar, or a new set of water colours, not even a new brother!"

"Ahaha! So what were you thinking of getting then?"

"Umm, a cat..."