

Daffodil

Mina Han

He remembers the first time he saw her as if it were just a blink ago. Sometimes he tries to see it all again by blinking once more, pretending the flashes of darkness are her long dark hair whipping in the wind and hitting him in the face. It never works. There's never a continuation. She should be turning around by now, with her eyes wide in both embarrassment and amusement as she holds her sunhat down with one hand and covers her open mouth with the other. He should be nervously laughing it off and offering a witty remark. Her eyes should be narrowing. He should be babbling. She should be tilting her head. He should be scratching the back of his own. The corner of her lip should be edging up and his should be doing the same.

He rolled over in his bed, flinging his arms out like a starfish. The stucco ceiling looked so much like her skin. The sunlight cast a glow faintly tinted with her favourite dress.

He sighed.

How many months will it be until they can see each other again? Face-to-face? Life is feeling more and more like a book every day. Or would it be a television series? He flipped onto his side. No, it isn't a book or a television series, it's just a slideshow of pictures on loop. Nothing is changing—except for the worse.

“How very optimistic of you,” she would say, raising her eyebrows in that one unreproducible way. “I sure wonder why you remind me of a blobfish out of water.”

He's pathetic. She was consuming every thought of his to the point where he was practically practicing tulpamancy. Something must be done before he rots like this. He brainstormed for a bit before grabbing his phone.

“Hey,” he typed, “*are you up yet?*”

A few seconds passed, and then his phone buzzed.

“*no I’m sleeping*”

He grinned.

“*You’re not allowed out of the house, right?*”

“*unfortunately*”

The three dots did the usual dance that accompanied almost every message of hers, and he watched it like a polite spectator. She was the kind of person who would take multiple messages to complete one thought. It was quite annoying, but kept him hanging on her every word nonetheless. Perhaps it’s some sort of psychological thing that tricks one’s mind into thinking conversations are far more interesting than they really are?

“*actually, fortunately.*”

“*if I went out I’d end up carrying the virus home*”

“*really not good*”

“*my dad is on high blood pressure meds*”

“*and according to something he read*”

“*they increase the possibility of severe complications if he catches it*”

“*oh and he’s obese so*”

They messaged for a long while before he remembered his exciting idea, which he promptly shared with her. She screamed in caps lock. It was safe to say that she was willing to take part.

About thirty minutes later, he was halfway up the hill to her neighbourhood. If only he started doing this sooner! He could have seen her every day while fooling himself into exercising! And the more he did it, the easier it would get, which would lessen the amount of time it would take for him to get to her the next time, and the next time, and the next...

Just as discussed, she was waiting for him by the kitchen window, with the mesh and the glass pushed aside. Her hair was riddled with strange bumps. He smiled to himself. She must have slept well.

He walked into the front yard and picked up one of the garden chairs, carrying it over to the window. It was a lot harder than expected. She watched his struggle in amusement, sipping her tea like a smug noble watching a commoner work while in town.

When the chair was finally close enough to the window, he rested his elbow on it and struck a smarmy pose.

“So,” he said, wiggling his eyebrows and making the stupidest expression he could, “you come here often?”

She broke into laughter, her upper body leaning over the ledge. He loved her laugh. It sounded like the bray of a donkey, and her eyes would disappear into her face like a chocolate chip sinking into a rising cookie. Not that he'd know—he seldom baked. But if she were a cookie, her face would engulf that chocolate chip. That's how she is.

They talked about this, about that, about everything. She had passed him a mug of tea, but he barely made any progress with it before it turned cold. When he wasn't talking, he was listening, and he was so absorbed by her stories that he forgot about the mug warming his hands. There was never a quiet moment, and the conversation moved like an exciting game of tennis. It was different from their conversations over text, but he enjoyed them both. Maybe separating a sentence into multiple messages isn't a psychological trick? Or

perhaps it could be, but doesn't make a difference when one is interested in a person as a whole?

When it came time to say goodbye, she blew kisses and hugged the air. They can't touch, but just seeing each other's faces in person was enough.

Her face. How he loved her face. Her cheeks were full and rosy like ripe fruit. Her red-spotted forehead was always shrinking and expanding, moving this way and that with her expressive eyebrows. Her black eyes gleamed with intelligence. The line of her lips would go down, then up, then down, up, then down again before ending on an up. There was a mole at the very corner, which she was quite proud of. Apparently, it signified luck to food and drink.

He thought of the face as he walked down the hill. It can't belong to a book or a television series, nor is it just a feature in a slideshow of pictures. No, her face was always changing, and it was real. It was so real.

He looked up at the sky and smiled to himself.

Boy, is he glad that she's real.