

Charlie Smalley and Brie Ahmed

I looked up as I went into the room, scanning the crowd as subtly as I could. I searched the faces desperately. I needed to see him. I took a seat in the third chair, my heart pounding. Where was he? Why wasn't he here? I strained round in hopes of finding him, looking from stranger to stranger, searching for that aching familiarity.

There he was. Standing in the doorway, so strong, so silent. Colour rushed to my cheeks as he caught my eye, and I immediately turned my head back to the front. I could feel him looking at me, and out of the corner of my eye saw his footsteps start towards me. I felt numb, nervous. He took a seat next to me and as he put his belongings on the floor, his hand brushed lightly against my thigh. I shivered involuntarily. Was it a mistake? Or was I meant to feel that?

I glanced down at the shiny gold ring on his fourth finger and felt a stab of hurt shoot through me. I looked away and tried to focus, scolding myself for getting my hopes up. He was a married man. He wasn't mine.

The meeting dragged slowly, the rhythmic ticking of the clock barely audible above the droning voice of our boss. Sniffs, fingernails scratching, pens tapping across endless sheets of lined paper and the occasional cough caught my attention as I fought the urge to look at him. 3.09, and my throat was dry. I asked quietly for some water, which was passed to me. The glass passed from him to me, our hands briefly touched, and for a moment it was just us. The rest of the world, the dreary conference room and the concrete jungle, faded away. *Just hold on, half an hour to go*, I told myself. Half an hour and I'd be free to go home, sink into my solitude, alone on the sagging cerulean sofa.

There was one day when I had him. Just one day.

Or I wish there was. I always seem to confuse my dreams with reality. I shook my head guiltily as the ring twinkled at me, trying to shake away any shadow of hope I harboured of having him as my own.

The meeting finished, finally, and chairs scraped back on the mahogany floor and a blur of black and grey suits hurried out into the rain.

He looked at me as he left. It was pitying, empty, devoid of emotion. A quick smile and a wave as he left the building. I slowly gathered my things and my thoughts, and stepped out into the downpour, hoping the raindrops would wash away my sadness and my unrequited affection.