

IN THE STREET OF DREAMS



UDHAV SARASWAT

In the Street of Dreams

Udhav Saraswat

“Nothing makes sense — until one day, everything does, for better or worse.”

— Udhav

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Chapter 1 : The Train

The train hummed like a tired lullaby against the rails, each metallic rattle cutting through the silence of the afternoon. I had a book in my lap I wasn't reading and a life I wasn't exactly living.

Outside the window, fields blurred into one another — pale yellow merging with silver-gray. Inside, a girl sat across from me, tapping her fingers on her phone, her expression alive with some private excitement. Then she said, almost to herself, “What a day it was!”

Her voice startled me — not because it was loud, but because it was so full of light. You could hear the warmth in it, the kind that belongs to people who've just lived through something they'll remember.

I glanced up. She must have been twenty-two or twenty-three, with hair that refused to stay still and eyes that looked like they'd seen a secret. I didn't know her — not her name, not her story — but I'd been a quiet thief of her conversation for the last four stations.

She had been talking on the phone with a friend. Her tone rose and fell like a melody. “He gave me a letter,” she said at one point. “Yes — a love letter!” Then she laughed, that nervous,

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guilty laugh people make when they're both embarrassed and thrilled.

I didn't mean to listen, but in a train full of silence, stories travel fast.

Apparently, the letter somehow reached her father's desk. I could almost imagine that small domestic panic — the blood running cold, the heartbeat caught mid-air. But her father, oblivious, thought it was an academic note and simply handed it back.

I smiled quietly. Another love story, saved by innocence and timing.

Then she read part of the letter aloud, her voice soft and unguarded:

"It's been some nights that I can't fall asleep. Is it you, or the curse of your love that's made me restless? I wait for you — tonight, at Baran Bock."

It was clumsy and beautiful in equal measure — exactly the way love should sound. I felt something shift inside me, a strange nostalgia for something that wasn't even mine.

She spoke again, her words now fading into laughter. "No, no, I haven't gone to meet him yet. Maybe tomorrow," she said. Tomorrow.

And I, the stranger across the aisle, found myself wondering how it would unfold — her tomorrow, his letter, their meeting. My imagination started stitching together scenes: her at the bar, a little nervous; him waiting with a drink that's gone warm from waiting too long; the air heavy with that electric tension before a

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confession.

Maybe they'd talk for hours. Maybe they'd fall in love. Maybe they'd part and never meet again. Maybe.

The train kept its rhythm, echoing the pulse of thoughts I couldn't quiet.

When the next station arrived — Pervouralsk — I stood, still half in her story. I looked back at her once, silently saying goodbye. She caught my eyes and smiled faintly, as if she knew I'd been her secret audience all along.

Maybe that was enough — to be a quiet witness to someone else's unfolding happiness.

I stepped off the train into the mist. The cold air greeted me like an old acquaintance, wrapping around my coat, filling my lungs with the taste of iron and smoke. Pervouralsk — the city of mist and stories.

Chapter 2 : The City of Mist

They say the mornings here are made of smoke and secrets. Some claim the mist comes from the love and warmth that binds this city together — a visible breath of brotherhood. Others insist it's just the result of burning weeds in the next district.

I've lived long enough to know both explanations are wrong. The mist comes from memory. From all the things this city refuses to forget.

It was my second time in Pervouralsk. I had studied here once, long ago. The streets remembered me better than I remembered them. I had come now to begin a job I didn't plan for — a sales position that I never applied for but somehow landed on a sleepy Saturday evening.

The HR manager's voice on the phone had been cheerful.
“Congratulations! We think you'd be perfect for the role.”

“The sales role?” I asked, confused. “I applied for system configurations.”

“Yes,” she said, unfazed, “but you'll learn fast. And the pay's good.”

Chapter 2 : The City of Mist

And that was that. Sometimes, fate isn't poetic — it's practical.

I stayed with my old college friend, Strive. He lived in a narrow apartment near the old tram line, with too many books and too little furniture. His girlfriend, Olivia, came by often. She worked as a librarian — elegant, curious, and impossibly patient with Strive's disordered ways.

Their love story was the kind that begins with an accident. Strive had written an anonymous letter once — meant for someone else, signed by no one — but it ended up in Olivia's hands. She read it, smiled, and decided to reply. That was years ago, and they've been writing each other ever since — even though they now live together.

"You know," Strive said one evening as we sat with cheap vodka and old records playing, "maybe life only begins when we make the wrong delivery."

I laughed. "You mean like misdelivered letters?"

He nodded. "Or misdelivered dreams."

The city was quiet that night. Outside the window, the mist thickened, blurring the streetlights into halos. I thought about that girl on the train again, her half-told story still unfinished in my mind.

Maybe she was from Pervouralsk too. Maybe somewhere in this fog, her tomorrow had already begun.

Chapter 3 : Ciaa and the Sea

There is a street before the old church — narrow, cobbled, lined with birch trees that lean slightly toward each other as if whispering. In winter, the branches catch the snow like lace. In spring, they release it all in one shimmering breath.

At the far end of that street is a bench — my bench — old wood worn smooth by years of solitude. From there, you can see the river curve quietly beneath a low bridge, and in the evenings, the sky blushes gold before it gives itself to stars.

That street had been my refuge during my college years in Pervouralsk. I spent hours there after lectures, sketching thoughts in the margins of notebooks, smoking until the air around me looked like memory itself. I had grown to know the rhythm of that place — the laughter of children from the nearby playground, the creak of the church gate, the smell of rain when the wind came from the north.

It was on that bench that I first met Ciaa.

She appeared one evening as quietly as dusk. The street was almost empty, and I was counting the early stars when she walked up and asked, “Is this seat taken?”

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Her accent betrayed her before her words did — soft, lilting, undeniably Spanish.

“No,” I said, shifting slightly. “It’s everyone’s bench. The city just lets me borrow it sometimes.”

She smiled, and in that smile was something familiar — the ease of someone who belongs to the moment entirely. She introduced herself. “Ciaa,” she said, extending her hand. “Final year, linguistics.”

I shook it. “Same year. Engineering.”

“I’ve seen you in the library,” she said, eyes narrowing playfully. “You always sit near the window but never open your books.”

“I observe,” I said, pretending to be mysterious.

“And what do you observe?”

“The weather,” I said. “And people who ask too many questions.”

She laughed. A real laugh, bright and unguarded — the kind that makes you want to keep talking just to hear it again.

From that evening, the bench belonged to both of us. We met there often — sometimes by plan, sometimes by coincidence. On weekends, we’d walk to Baron Buchito, a small café at the corner of the street, hidden behind a curtain of ivy. The owner, an old man named Viktor, brewed coffee that could convince even heartbreak to stay a little longer.

Our conversations never really had a point. We spoke about films, her hometown in Spain, the sky, language, and sometimes nothing at all. She told me she came here to study translation,

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though she believed some feelings could never be translated.

“What word,” she asked one day, “would you use for the feeling of wanting something you already lost?”

I thought for a moment. “Memory,” I said.

She smiled. “That’s a cruel word.”

“It’s the only one I know.”

Before graduation, we decided to take a short trip to Czar Island, a small place off the coast, reachable by an old ferry that coughed more than it sailed. We stayed in a modest inn that smelled of salt and wood polish.

The second evening, we rented a small boat. The sea was glassy and calm. The sun was lowering itself into the horizon, spilling gold into the water.

She leaned over the edge, pointing. “Look! A gold fin fish,” she said.

I turned, and indeed — a flash of metallic light rippled beneath the surface.

“They’re rare here,” she said. “You’re lucky to see one.”

“I’m luckier to be here with you,” I said before realizing how hopelessly cinematic that sounded.

She rolled her eyes but smiled. “You sound like a letter.”

“Maybe I am one.”

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Then she reached a little too far trying to touch the fish, and in one terrible instant, she slipped. The boat tilted violently; the sea swallowed her with a gasp.

I froze. For a heartbeat, the world stopped breathing. Then instinct pulled me back — I reached for her, but the water had already blurred her outline into the deep blue.

And then, like a miracle, she surfaced — laughing. “Are you trying to kill me with your silence?” she said, brushing her wet hair back.

“You nearly gave me a heart attack.”

She climbed back into the boat, drenched and radiant, water dripping from her eyelashes like tears the sea had lent her.

That night, we returned to the inn and had Italian dinner — spaghetti, wine, silence. Outside, the wind moved through the palms like a restless ghost.

She spoke softly after a while. “I’ll be going back to Spain after convocation,” she said. “My father’s business needs me. My brother’s in Madrid now.”

I nodded. “You’ll do great.”

She studied my face. “And you? What do you want?”

I looked at the glass in my hand. “I’m not sure yet. Maybe to find the answer on some bench in some forgotten street.”

She reached across the table, her hand brushing mine for a second — no promises, no declarations. Just a quiet acknowledgment that sometimes, connection doesn’t need permanence to be real.

Chapter 3 : Ciaa and the Sea

After convocation, she left.

At first, we exchanged a few letters — short, kind, cautious. Then, silence. The kind that doesn't hurt but settles slowly, like dust.

Years later, I heard she was married — a name mentioned in passing, a photograph seen by someone else. I imagined her somewhere under the Spanish sun, walking down a street that looked nothing like ours, holding a child, smiling the same way.

Sometimes, when nights get too quiet, I wonder if she ever thinks of Pervouralsk, of that street, of the boy who almost lost her to the sea.

The bench remained after she left. So did I.

I spent many evenings there in those months, talking to the stars as if they owed me answers. I even named some of them, foolishly believing that naming something keeps it from leaving.

Now, years later, I still wonder if those same stars look down and recognize me — older, quieter, still sitting beneath them in memory.

Chapter 4 : The Street of Dreams

Ten years later, I returned to Pervouralsk. The city felt smaller — or perhaps I had outgrown its dimensions. The streets were paved now, the café had changed owners, and the birch trees on the church road had grown heavy with their own histories. The air smelled of rain and old wood, just as it used to.

I arrived on a late autumn afternoon, suitcase in hand, the sky bruised with the first hint of snow. I was supposed to meet my fiancée that evening at a new restaurant by the river, a place everyone said had the best view in town. But instead of calling a cab, I began walking.

Every step along those cobblestones was a conversation with time. The bakery where I once bought stale bread for dinner had become a florist's shop. The post office, where I mailed a letter that was never answered, was now painted mint green. And the bench — my bench — still stood at the edge of the street, darkened by years, waiting.

I sat down.

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The wind moved through the trees the same way it did in my youth — a rustle, a whisper, a soft insistence that nothing truly stays. The river below looked indifferent.

For a moment, I closed my eyes and imagined the old world sliding back into place — the faint sound of laughter, the weight of notebooks, the scent of coffee and tobacco, and her voice: Is this seat taken?

When I opened my eyes, the bench beside me was empty, but the air felt inhabited. I found myself smiling, not out of longing, but gratitude — the kind that comes when you finally understand that some absences are just another form of presence.

That night, I went to meet Anaya, my fiancée. She was waiting at a corner table, her face lit by candlelight, reading something on her phone. When she saw me, she smiled — the kind of smile that belongs to the present, not the past.

“You’re late,” she said softly.

“I took a long detour,” I replied.

“Did you find what you were looking for?”

I hesitated, then nodded. “Yes. A street I once dreamed of. And a version of myself I’d forgotten.”

She reached across the table and took my hand. Her fingers were warm, steady — the quiet proof that life does move forward, even when memory keeps turning back.

Later, back in the hotel, I opened my old journal — the same one that had once held the sketches of the bench, the ferry, the sea.

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Most of the ink had faded, but the lines still breathed faintly beneath the paper's yellowing skin.

At the end of the book, on an empty page, I wrote:

Some stories don't end; they dissolve into the air. Some faces remain not to haunt us, but to remind us we once felt deeply enough to remember, Perhaps we never live them — perhaps they live us, And every city keeps a part of you — just as you keep a part of it.

Outside, the first snow began to fall — soft, hesitant flakes melting against the glass. The streetlights flickered, the night hummed faintly with the sound of passing trains, and somewhere in that silence, I heard the sea again.

Not as an echo of loss — but as a promise that everything once loved, returns in another form.

The next morning, I left Pervouralsk once more. But this time, I didn't look back. Because some places, once revisited, stop being memories — they become part of your pulse.

And when the train pulled away, I realized that the story I'd been chasing all these years had already found its ending.

It wasn't in the girl, the bench, or the sea. The mist followed me a while, then disappeared. But I knew, with a calm that was almost joy, that the city would keep dreaming me long after I was gone.

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