FLASH FICTION

Colourless Fridays

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"Rippled Memories" by Hana Nekrep

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When they meet first, they share a dash, being red-haired or twenty-one.

Next to them, a cement mixer, grazing like a cow.

And when he sees her, he doesn't ask for her name but her sun protection factor.

You look like a spy, he doesn't dare say at first.

Not until they are cooking spaghetti in a shared flat near the city centre.

Only then, when a slippery noodle falls onto the chequerboard tiles, laying there like thick, unwashed hair.

Only then he says it, as she falls to her knees in prayer,

slurping the pasta from the floor with pursed lips.

And because it's been too long, a few lines already, he forgets what he wanted to say and says something else. She overhears, boiling pasta water in her ear, a hot soda fountain.

And he repeats, that day, a week later.

He wears the same nail polish, not knowing which splinters broke off when.

She stretches her fingertips out of the grey taxi’s lowered window, catching invisible sounds.

A glottal in her gaze as she looks at him.

She wants to have fun. Doesn't he?

The fish-like taxi gliding past all boundless hopes for a lucent Friday.

The next time they meet, she has chickenpox and he, a frog in his throat.

He has forgotten the answer to when she was born.

He types congratulations, fingers hovering over the button, erasing characters.

A lonesome gift box in a message line, when her call lights up his screen.

He only answers after switching on the ambience.

Before unrecognisable names drop from the receiver; vibrant, flamboyant, shimmering stories attached to them.

The next time they meet, he's wet from fog and she's twenty-five.

That is when he lies on the cold chequerboard tiles.

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And barefooted she tiptoes in the gaps formed by his body.

The triangle of his bent arm, a chalk silhouette.

Toothpaste drips from her mouth onto his face as she answers.

He's watched her, in the heavy heat, fingers airarmed and hair dampnecked.

He's seen her laughter float over dancing bodies that ate it up.

He feels nausea in the midst of ecstasy like Heliophobia.

He wants to ask her — point-blank, blank-spaced, and question-marked.

Though she spits toothpaste, laughing the laugh that belongs only to her.

When they eventually meet, he’s in his mid-twenties and she’s heavily distracted.

Picking up a receipt that had fallen from her coat pocket, he incoherently reads purchases.

While she, on a video call with raspy-voiced-people.

Sun-dried tomatoes, flower oil and sun milk.

Fancy a party? she asks, glancing at him.

He is still holding the receipt, while her head disappears into the taxi’s belly, the voracious fish, gleaming silver.

Poisonous green soles of her trainers, stains of sun lotion on her legs.

When they suddenly meet, she is surprised and he, almost twenty-nine.

She says, *What a colourless Friday*, but selfishly he only sees the sun in her eyes.

Do you still have those tiles, he likes to say, but a squirrel screams, with her barking back like a confused child at the zoo.

Tiles. Black and white. Light and dark — but she gets this phone call.

Then only one-eighth of her smile is directed to him.

When they meet for the first time, she is thirty-two and he is not present.

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