FLASH FICTION

Rearview Echoes

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"In the Back Seat" by Vanesa Erjavec

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07:05 AM

She boards in silence, fingers tapping her phone like it’s a lifeline.

Her eyes are ringed in sleepless smudges, mascara barely clinging.

“Have you ever run away from your house?” she whispers.

Then, nothing.

Her perfume smells like goodbye.

08:03 AM

A navy blazer. Lips rehearsing rebellion.

She mouths, “Today I choose me,” like it’s both a vow and a verdict.

The air hums with the tension of turning points.

I silence the radio,

let her moment echo.

08:42 AM

A man eats a sandwich in my backseat like it’s his last joy on earth.

“Wife’s packed it. Still packs lunch after twenty years.”

He says it with a grin lined with fatigue.

I nod.

Some loves are buttered and wrapped in foil.

09:41 AM

A teen with purple hair hums off-key.

Headphones in, world off.

At the kerb, she asks, “You don’t mind my voice?”

“It’s yours,” I reply. “Sing it.”

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10:30 AM

The backseat becomes a cricket field.

Stats volleyed, legends summoned.

When Kapil Dev is quoted, the younger one surrenders.

“Fine, Dad. You win. Like always.”

I laugh. So do they.

11:17 AM

Two corporate men argue.

Buzzwords bounce like stray bullets.

One says “synergy,” the other says “margin.”

They don’t notice the beggar knocking on the window at the red light.

He leaves a handprint.

Neither of them blinks.

12:03 PM

A girl in a school uniform climbs in, alone.

“Do you know sloths hold their breath longer than dolphins?”

She beams, waiting.

I tell her I don’t.

We both believe in magic again,

for at least a mile.

12:55 PM

He deletes photos with surgical silence.

Memories vanish into digital dust.

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Birthdays, beaches, blurred smiles.

When we stop, he nods.

“You’ve been a witness.”

I hadn’t said a word.

Still, I feel altered.

01:46 PM

She smells of antiseptic and exhaustion.

A nurse just off her duty shift.

“Didn’t lose anyone today,” she says.

Then, almost to herself,

“That’s a win.”

Some victories wear scrubs and silence.

02:20 PM

Three hijabs. One lipstick. Infinite laughter.

One’s in love, one’s unlearning it,

and the third?

“I’ve sworn off men until Tuesday.”

They tip in coins and the kind of kindness

that stays longer than the ride.

03:09 PM

They are laughing.

Young. In love.

One speaks in Hindi, the other replies in Tamil,

but their laughter rhymes.

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04:20 PM

A man clutches a bouquet as though it might explode.

“First date in fifteen years,” he says. “With my ex-wife.”

“Bold,” I reply.

“Or stupid.”

“Sometimes they’re the same.”

We both chuckle.

When he gets out, he leaves a rose petal on the seat.

I don’t brush it off.

05:37 PM

A woman cries softly.

Not the sobbing kind. The held-in kind.

Salt trails down her cheeks.

No sound.

Just silence heavy enough to fog the mirror.

She says nothing.

I do the same.

07:00 PM

The traffic snarls like a beast.

My car becomes a capsule of waiting.

A toddler points at the sky.

“Moon!”

We all look up.

Even I.

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08:05 PM

Sequins and stilettos beside sneakers.

She gleams. He dims.

“You okay?” I ask him.

He nods, eyes on the road.

“He just found out his mum passed,” she murmurs.

“But he didn’t want to miss the show.”

They hold hands.

Grief and glitter.

Clashing but clasped.

09:18 PM

He gets in smelling of cheap rum and regret.

“Messed it up,” he mutters.

Then, “She won’t take me back.”

I drive slowly. Maybe the night can forgive him

If I do.

10:45 PM

Final ride.

A sari scattered with stars.

Eyes older than her face.

At her stop, she turns and says,

“You see so much, sitting still.”

She steps out. The door clicks shut.

The car empties.

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The stories don’t.

I tap to go offline.
But pause.
Glance at the mirror.
There’s my reflection,
and behind it —
a child in a school uniform.
Grinning.
Backpack huge.
“Sloths,” she says. “Remember?”
I blink.
The seat’s empty again.
Just me.
And the city,
still breathing through me.

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