

*fresh air*

Luwita Hana Randhawa

I open the door and she bounds out of it. It's her favorite time of day.

She stops at the end of the pathway, drops, and vigorously rolls around on the tarmac. She does it every time.

I catch up to her and she gets up. She holds her body upright and at the ready now.

She scans the horizon. Her ears move to the sounds they are picking up. Her tail swings low as she assesses the situation.

It's safe.

The pathway opens to the outdoor parkade of our residential complex. We cross it together. I walk straight across, out in the open, but she jumps up into the elevated flowerbeds and disappears behind the bushes, fully camouflaged.

I've never seen an athlete quite like her. How she navigates so expertly through any terrain. The hunter to my gatherer.

We reach the end of the parkade. Here a fence separates our complex from the abandoned trailer park next door. I can't pass, but there's a break in the fence where she can squeeze through.

She brushes against my left leg and I bend down to give her a scratch and a pat. We do it every time.

I tell her, "Have fun, sweetheart. Be careful. I'll be here."

She's off.

A flight of stairs connects the parkade to the main road. I climb them and sit myself down at the top. Something she taught me – always choose the highest vantage point.

Her wander might take ten minutes or thirty, and she might not return from where she left, but from here I'll be able to see.

It's a beautiful day. Warm with a breeze. The sky is a gleaming aquamarine.

I close my eyes and feel the wind on my face. I hear it move through the trees. My mind stretches out and my body with it; I'm relaxed.

I don't know how much time passes. Then –

“Is that your cat?”

I open my eyes and return to the present. My cat is before me, seated upright. So light-footed she is that I did not hear her return.

At the base of the stairs, a young man is looking up at us warmly. My cat watches him intently, summing him up.

“Yeah, she is,” I reply.

“She's a beauty.”

I break instantly into a smile and look down proudly at my cat. “Thank you,” I gush. I look back up. “Tripoli.”

“What?”

“Her name's Tripoli. You were gonna ask that next, right?”

He laughs. “Yeah, I was.”

I'm still smiling.

“That's a great name. Like, after the city?”

“Yeah, exactly.”

“Cool.” He thought it too, I could tell. “She likes being out?”

“She loves it. We go on walks a few times a day.”

“She doesn't take off?”

“No – Well, we practiced quite a bit at doing it this way, so she's used to it now.”

“That's cool, man. I always think about taking my cat out, but I never know how.”

At this point, I have so many questions. Where do I start –

“Well, I was just passing through. I’m headed this way.”

Never mind. “Yeah, for sure. Enjoy the day, it’s so nice out.”

“And you two enjoy your walk. Bye, Tripoli!”

He starts to walk off. Then he stops and turns around. “Tom.”

“What?”

“My name’s Tom.” He starts walking off again, but backwards now, smiling. “You were gonna ask that next, right?”

I laugh. Yeah, I was.