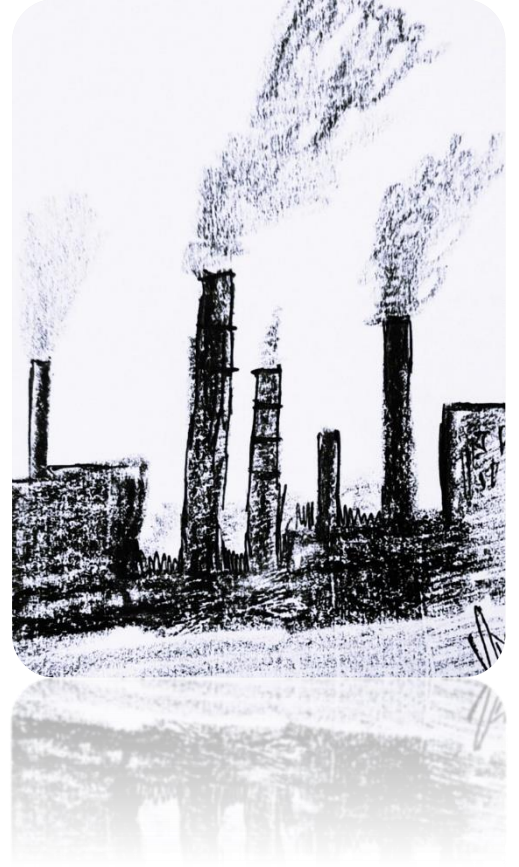


Smoker

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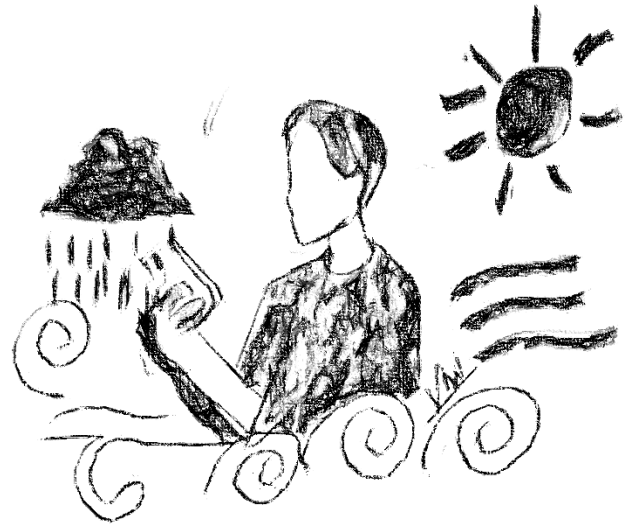
The newspaper makes an announcement,
“We smoke at least 10 cigarettes a day in Delhi”.
Even if we do not inhale a single puff,
we are all smokers. Without spending even a *paisa*,
we are painting our lungs black.
But an interesting detail has been left out by the paper.
Though we are smoking, we are not getting the joy of it.
The joy of the rushing nicotine in our bloodstream,
and getting lost in some alternate reality.
Whenever I imagine someone smoking a cigarette,
an image of them writing a poem comes to my mind, like
Bukowski.
But sadly, with this smoking it's hard to imagine,
someone sitting on a desk with pen in hands,
just pouring the words down on the paper.
We all have become smokers,

but we're not writing any poems.



AQI

Cramped in our two-bedroom flat
with an air purifier, making sad noises in a
corner,
We fantasize of lush green gardens.
And we just check the AQI in the phone,
it's dark red and says "very unhealthy".
"With rain it becomes better", someone says,
and everybody sighs.
Now we are waiting for the rain,
rain arrives, after weeks of waiting.
We dance gleefully and jump,
in our 10-foot wide balcony,
of our two-room flat.
Suddenly someone checks the AQI again,
it has turned to orange now, and says "unhealthy".
We come back inside the room
and start fantasizing about lush green gardens again.



Stars

I see that I am a kid again
And laying with my grandma on a cot,
she is telling me stories of wonder and chivalry.
And I, just laying there staring at the sky.
While my ears may be swallowing my grandma's
words,
my eyes fathom the dark distant skies and tiny stars.
Stars were something
that were a very close part of me growing up,
Passage of time and the pursuits of this world,
uprooted me from my grandma's place, and
from all her stories.
Now when returning from my office,
After so much time, I remembered stars.
I stick my head out of my car
and stare at the sky, and I find nothing.
I panic and think, where did all the stars go?
But I couldn't ponder on that question for long,
the traffic behind me was getting desperate.
On a distant evening, sitting in my drawing room,
I turn the TV on,
the presenter is talking about light pollution.
She says that too much light in the sky,
reduces the visibility of the stars.



Decibles

My mother complains to me that
I didn't hear her call when I was in the lawn.
She called me six times, she says,
But I just didn't pay any heed.
And I am here trying to tell her
That I didn't hear anything, apart from
Truck horns, mechanical noises of huge machines,
Engaged in construction sites in the neighbourhood.
I say apologies to my wife and turn on the TV,
The ad runs of a tourist place far from me,
The caption says, "Spend your holidays
In serene and calm hills".
I was baffled, how come what I deserve
Has become a luxury. And now I have to pay
To experience a calm, noiseless day.
Just then my mother storms in, saying
"Why don't you hear? The father's calling you."
I turn off the TV and walk towards my father.

