

*EXCERPTS FROM EROTEXT AUTHORED BY SUDEEP SEN, PUBLISHED BY
VINTAGE: PENGUIN RANDOM HOUSE*

HEATHER

I lie next to the sea. It is dead still, except for the invisible rippling soundless undulations the water makes as it breathes. There is no moonlight, but it is not pitch dark.

You kiss me everywhere — everywhere, for hours and hours and hours. My lips are dry, my body salt-encrusted. You have eaten every bit of pleasure, yours and mine. I feel parched, dry, in spite of all the plenitude of water and our body-sweat.

The sand too is sweating beneath us. Every grain remembers every wave, every caress, leaving behind just salt, a silver layer of salt as a gift — a talisman of love, of their inconsistent meetings.

I feel parched like the sea-salt gauze. My tongue is parched in spite of your lavender saliva, saliva which has changed from that bouquet to the taste of heather, wild weather-ravaged heather.

I look around for light, but I can only see reflection. There is more beauty in second-hand glaze — sky's dark light radiating off your lashes, water's blue light hiding in your navel, the beach's grainy light lying unwiped on your nipples, and the light's invisible inner light stored in your pupils.

The sea is getting restless. But I am dead still, except for the inaudible swishing that one can hear when you press yourself against my heart.

I need to taste the grainy light that you wrap your skin in, each and every grain that maps the slow deliberate contours of your body.

FEMININE MUSK

1.

My body temperature is steaming, higher than the highest calibration on the stem. I need to get out of this hot house.

I go out, walk past the stream, to the overgrown meadows. There is a lake

at the end of it. I am not a swimmer — but I like water on my skin.

Blindly, I follow the foot-worn mud-track to the shores of the lake. It is a very large lake that almost looks like the sea. This stretch is isolated, visited only by people who might stray off their course.

I reach the water's edge. I dip my feet in it. It is freezing even on what I thought was a hot scorching day. Maybe I am misguided by my own body temperature.

I unbutton and take off my sweat-drenched shirt. My jeans are drenched too. I cup my hands and scoop out fistfuls of water and splash it all over me. I am drenched, seemingly cooler, but still hot in heat.

I let my feet dangle in the water and lie back on the shore's wet mud. I do not know when I doze off — lying dead still.

2.

The taste of cold glass-stem in my mouth wakes my senses. A cross-country trekker who happened to pass by this route thought that I must be 'not-quite-dead' but close. She decided to stop, take out the medical kit from her rucksack and help me.

When I open my eyes, I am a little bleary. I can't quite focus, but I see an outline of a woman's face, her hair falling all over my face and her naked chest as she kneels over me holding my hand, counting the pulse beats.

I am not quite there yet. She takes the thermometer out of my mouth, reads it, and then without saying a word takes her scarf off and dips it in the lake water. She puts the drenched feminine-musk cloth on my forehead, pressing down gently, letting the cool water wet my hair and upper body.

I do not say a word, how can I, I think I am dreaming. She does not say a word. I just look at her, long and silently at the same time, hoping she does not think I am staring at her.

She is wearing well-worn ankle-high Birkenstocks, denim shorts, a skin-coloured sleeveless vest-top, silver-stud earrings, and a silver necklace with a stone pendant that dangles very close to my lips. Her *kohl*-lined Wedgwood-blue eyes have a deep penetrating gaze.

Her wet scarf on my forehead is trying to bring my temperature down. But my body heat is rising. I can only smell the air's heat, my body heat, her heat, her female scent — I am feverish and woman-soaked.