

Victoria Gate

by Collin Kelley

Maybe she was crying before she got on the coach at Marble Arch, settled in the seat across from me, but by the time we reach Victoria Gate, tears stream down her face, mouth open to receive her own sacrament.

Indian, ageless in tasteful floral, a blue sweater despite summer heat, an iPod clutched in her hand. Traditional music bleeds from earbuds, then shifts to Bollywood techno beat. And still she cries. Along Bayswater Road, her glassy eyes reverential, meeting her gaze feels like blasphemy. Who is she missing or mourning, or maybe it's what — her own bed, mother's cooking, stillness.

London is short on sympathy when it comes to heartbreak and homesickness, not so subtly tells you to walk it off. But sometimes at night when you're riding past Hyde Park and dusky silhouettes arm-in-arm are framed by bus windows, a familiar song can collapse resolve, make you reach for the red hammer over your seat to crack the escape glass, unbuckle and rise through the treetops until the lamp at Victoria Gate is a pinprick, insignificant, up to the stratosphere where equilibrium inverts and tears become the stars that will guide you home.

