

# Seal Skin

*by* J.A. Pak

I had told myself that I would not cry. That I would hold on to my anger so tightly, there would be no space for pity. And I did not cry, until the plane was in the air, and I was alone, and he was with her.

It was just a single tear, dropped because of a second of distraction—the remembrance of how much he had loved me.

And then there was another tear, and another, and another, and the man sitting next to me told me it was not an uncommon thing. People often cried on planes. Human migration tended to coincide with physical and emotional turmoil. It is not an uncommon thing, broken hearts, he said. His voice was like the waters surrounding a sacred temple, ancient, primordial; his voice was that ancient thing inside of me. I needed to hold him.

He asked me my name. Lily. He laughed because he could have guessed it, it was so natural to me, and for the first time, I felt it was my name and I was glad.

His name was Brenn. There was so much of him that seemed old, so much of him that seemed young, I could not guess his age. He was a beautiful listener and he listened to every part of me so that I was telling him my entire story.

I was all brittle fragments:

Love had shattered me, and that love was locked deep inside the other part of this plane, locked deep apart from me. Every cell in my body cried out that this separation was wrong. That this separation did not make sense. He loved me, but suddenly, he loved her. Quick, like a gasp of air, they were married. And now they were on their honeymoon. A European honeymoon, London, Paris,

Berlin, Santorini. A honeymoon he and I had imagined for us. This was why I needed to hurt them. Because they had torn asunder this part of me. I will follow them, hound them without pity. In silence. They will only see me out of the corners of their eyes. I will be a black shadow, the mourner's weeds to blacken their happiness. They will not forget my death is their happiness.

Brenn nodded and smiled and I knew he understood, that he appreciated. You are so much like someone I once knew, so very long ago, he whispered. I think a part of me was healed then.

I did as I said I would. Day after day I followed them. But it was not as I had expected. They were not what I had expected. Each time they glimpsed me, there was a look in their eyes, of sympathy, of pity. There was even love in his.

It broke me.

A month later I was back in London and out of money. Out of everything really, since I'd given up my job and home for this one revenge. And I didn't even have revenge.

In my pocket was Brenn's phone number. He'd given it to me as the plane had landed. Call me, he'd said, promise me you will call me if you ever need my help.

We met at Somerset House, at the ice rink. I told him about the failure of my revenge and he was as puzzled as I was. Perhaps a curse would work better, he suggested. There were many kinds of curses. Curses involving love, business, health. Curses that burn slowly, ate the soul like corrosive acid. Or make one hungry, so hungry the soul is driven mad. Or, he suggested, you can forget about him and everything you know and come home with me.

I threw myself into his arms and held him as if I were holding my own soul; I knew all I wanted was in his arms.

