

*[Miguel has joined the chat. Active chat members: Akilah, William, Samiya, James, Rosa, Zhen, Yevdokiya, Marie, Miguel]*

*Miguel: guys I don't want to do exams help*

*Zhen: When are your exams?*

*Miguel: Next week*

*Rosa: me every day tbh*

*Samiya: Miguel I'm praying for you*

*James: ugh exams*

*William: set the exam papers on fire*

*Samiya: Will no*

*James: Will yes*

*Miguel: my whole school would probably burn down*

*Marie: I see no downside there*

*Yevdokiya: Wish I could do the same. If I tried to light a fire here it'd probably freeze solid.*

*Zhen: Yev I feel you there's a typhoon here tomorrow so probably no fires for me*

*Zhen: I'm really excited honestly*

*Samiya: Zhen will you be okay???*

*William: Don't get washed away*

*Miguel: I think it might be the same one that hit here*

*Zhen: Yeah Samiya I'll be fine! Don't worry*

*Zhen: And Miguel yeah I think it did hit the Philippines first*

*Akilah: I wish I could have a little rain right about now*

*[Yevdokiya has left the chat. Active chat members: Akilah, William, Samiya, James, Rosa, Zhen, Marie, Miguel]*

There is movement in Yevdokiya's father's room and she quickly shuts her laptop and phone, sliding them under her bed and faking sleep.

It's colder than usual for this time of year. The frost in every breath makes Yevdokiya reluctant to get up again to fetch her laptop, even when the sounds from the other room go silent.

Instead of sleeping, she wonders about her future. It's been hard not to worry about that, of late. She wants to go to university, to study science. She dreams of going to space. Not many Russian women have had that honour. Only four. Yevdokiya wants to be the fifth.

*Miguel: God I miss you guys*

*Samiya: Me too!!! 😊😊😊*

*Marie: I miss you all so much*

*James: Yeah it's real boring here without you guys*

*Zhen: I miss you guys too I'm gonna cry*

*Marie: Zhen you need to sleep*

*Zhen: You're thousands of miles away make me*

*Akilah: Sleep is for the weak and the sensible.*

Akilah has insomnia. She hates it, but she loves the silent hours of the night, and the way Beirut looks from her window when no one else is watching.

*[Beatriz has joined the chat. Active chat members: Akilah, William, Samiya, James, Rosa, Zhen, Marie, Miguel, Beatriz]*

*Beatriz: I survived school*

*Samiya: Hey Beatriz!*

*Zhen: I give in. I am weak. I chose sleep.*

*Miguel: Bye Zhen! Stay safe!*

*[Zhen has left the chat. Active chat members: Akilah, Samiya, James, Marie, William, Miguel, Beatriz]*

Somewhere between roads of arteries clogged with cars and the exhales of smog breaths in cold air, Hong Kong unfolds like a map across the ground. Already the air is tense. It is ready for the typhoon to strike, tense with anticipation and warning. And somewhere between the gridlines and rising murmurs of street-dwellers, there stands a gargantuan apartment block like so many else in the city. On the third floor, Zhen gently coaxes her lithe grey cat in through the window.

"Good boy," she croons softly. "No, you don't want to be out there now. It's getting nasty."

Her cat mrrrows in agreement and winds itself around her legs. She scoops him up and carries him to her soft, safe bed.

*William: Gtg, pre Calculus now. Bye*

*Rosa: I'm off, gotta do that homework I've been procrastinating*

*Akilah: 'Night, Rosa, sleep well!*

*Beatriz: Shhh homework is a fantasy*

*Samiya: Beatriz I dream that too*

*James: Rosa, my darling, dream sweet dreams of our love.*

*Rosa: Jajaja Jimmy you make me laugh*

*[Rosa and William have left the chat. Active chat members: Akilah, Samiya, James, Marie, Miguel, Beatriz]*

In Brasilia, it is four in the afternoon and just over twenty degrees. Rosa stops outside her casa, glancing up at the looming white walls and open shutters on the windows. It stands south of the sweeping architectural lines of the main city in an area where few care if the paint starts to peel. With a quick flick of long fingers she pulls out her key and slips it into the lock, turning the tumblers and letting herself in. The shade is a welcome relief after the heat of the day.

William is still stuck in school. He can hear the boys behind him making crude remarks to each other as they settle into class. The girl two desks to his right is taking a nap. Loud, young voices are babbling over each other, and the teacher calls out even louder in an attempt to start the lesson.

*James: I'm actually gonna sleep too, it's half two here. Night*

*Marie: You mean morning.*

*Akilah: Time is a meaningless construct.*

*[Miguel and James have left the chat. Active chat members: Akilah, Samiya, Marie, Beatriz]*

James kicks back in the humid Caribbean night and tries to sleep. He's used to it, after all. He's spent all the years of his life here. He will probably spend all the rest here, too.

*Beatriz: Well I come on and everyone leaves, I see how it is.*

*Samiya: Lol Beatriz you know we love you*

And here is the thing: Samiya does, she loves Beatriz like she loves dark chocolate and painting and lotus flowers when they bloom. She loves Beatriz in a way that is not allowed for girls like her and not allowed full stop in this country.

Yet she loves her country too. It is hot and ancient and modern and lush. Egypt is a collision of where the old refuses to bow to the new, and the Great Pyramids loom while her city breathes like a living being. She loves the night sky when you're far out enough in the desert, and the stars get everywhere the same way sand does.

She loves her city.

Cairo is a city like a heatwave.

Cairo is a city like a shockwave.

Samiya has been in love with it since long before she heard the name of Beatriz Sanchez.

*[Juan and Klaus have joined the chat. Active chat members: Akilah, Samiya, Marie, Beatriz, Juan, Klaus]*

*Akilah: Yo.*

*Klaus: morning, sunshine.*

*Juan: What I have gathered from reading the above conversation is that Beatriz and I should burn our school down*

*Beatriz: Deal*

*Samiya: Allah help us all.*

Juan and Beatriz have been friends since childhood and they have learnt this city the way they learnt the lines on their own hands- Buenos Aires hums with colour like finger-paint, and Buenos Aires hums with life like laughter. It is chipped, but not broken. Anything is fixable when you are young, and kind, and dangerously brave. They have never been anything else.

*Akilah: Juan I miss having you next to me to insult all the time*

*Klaus: Oh here we go with another sob fest*

*Marie: crap I have nine minutes until my bus*

*Beatriz: JAJAJA Marie don't miss school*

*Marie: Bye!*

*[Marie has left the chat.]*

In the end, Marie has to run for her bus and she nearly misses it.

The sky is lightly drizzling, sparkling around her as she darts aboard breathlessly. Just in time.

As always, Marie sits by the window. She stares outside but all she can see is a blur of green and scattered rain. The bus is a quiet rumble on winding roads, a creak of brakes, a smell of damp clothing and people with too much cigarette smoke on their clothes. The outside air is fresh and pure and cold.

She thinks of her friends, thousands of miles away, while her bus ambles through Wellington New Zealand at nine o'clock in the morning.