

# STUNT MAN

There is a corner of a building where stunt men set up shop and sell fake suicides. They know to leap into the noiseless jungle far above the streets, and tumble like ragdolls without so much as a scratch. They melt into the sewage before anyone can notice their acrobatic mischief, and everyone is too frantic about the calamity to realise the body is gone: several pools of crowds form and every participant thinks the body is located at the feet of another throng, too dense to press through to. There is a helpless desperation to see the body, people buzzing frantically as if beholding it would reanimate the crumpled loss.

I pretended to be too dignified to seek out the body, and stayed around the pipelines with all the other intellectuals. I exercised reserved meditation and even suspiciously cornered the premises in case a culprit was slipping away with the aid of a diversion. I did not realise that it was not a murder, but a transaction.

With all my apprehensions, I could not help gulping and reaching for my throat in a renewed appreciation for my dear life. The sirens were wailing mothers and the streets were burning. People felt smacked. Even those that lingered coolly as if they'd seen a leap such as this one before. Everyone melted into the ground and fossilised with the event like a torched volcanic city. The building was a deathly protrusion upon the planet.

Curtailing our curiosity at the lacking stench of metallic blood, the leaping ninja that made thus a fool of us all was skirting the grimy network below our feet. He preferred to resign himself from our pathetic stupor, and focus on his deft movements, skimming through the unwalked channels like something inhuman. There was the faint murmur of commotion above his head, distant laments

obscured by the concrete. But he focused on the neverending obstacles ahead, the cracks and pipes that in obstructing his path allowed him to fly; precious enemies. Boundless energy. Nothing could put a lid on his ferocity, the eloquence of his flight. And yet he had energy to spare, on some muffled whim, to have the desire to cry. Suppressing this debilitating urge, he spun himself with ever increasing vigour.

Nobody realises what he is capable of, no one stands in awe of him, indeed he is necessarily invisible. His agility feeds on the tragedy of his exclusion, and so he renounces all human incentive, driven only by the ancient insistence that once drew deep roars out of the illiterate depths of our ancestors.

That was when it struck me, that a great hoax; a great injustice had been committed. I mused and inspected - determined to be the exception of the mockery. Suddenly I bounded off, running like a lunatic, led by the pulse of the beating ground that mourned like a ghost sending voiceless, desperate clues about the whereabouts of the cause of its death. I grinned, as much as one can grin under such circumstances, as I was gaining on him. Beneath me he struggled to escape my determined chase. My steps unnerved him and I grew delighted. We ran, one on top of the other. The way the ground shook beneath; the way the air between his body and the surrounding sewage pipes vibrated and whistled, narrated his flight. There was no reserve. Every gesture was meant. No matter that I was preying on him, he extended himself in his dance, not giving up the fluidity and flair of his leaps.

I began to fall in love with the person running beneath me. It was slowing me down even, compelled as I was to take stock of what he was doing down there, then speeding up just to remain witness to this incredible ability.

I grew tired. I was overcome with admiration. What did he think of my yearning steps? I wished to fall upon the ground, lying flat upon it, dissolving through it. But I had to keep up. My impression was that of incredulity. What was this absolutely impossible creature? I hoped my steps would turn meek and implore him to slow down and greet me.—But He only sped up, infuriated. I almost bumped into a fire hydrant. I had run through several puddles in which swam the specimens of urban life, and which now tried to adapt to their relocation upon my trouser leg. I sucked in my stomach and risked a sideways spring between two unacquainted pedestrians trying to overtake each other. It was after ruining a street performance, and being chased by enforcers of justice who assumed I was pickpocketing, that I turned a corner and abruptly felt him burst into flames beneath me. I knew then that I would never love again. It was short-lived, but lacked for nothing.

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#### **BIO**

Katarina is a London-based fine artist and writer concerned with wriggling into her own work and wearing it like a second skin. She works in jealous drawings, a one-woman empathy circus, a novel about a 'lethargic line' and fake Youtube tutorials.