

The Snow Globe (an excerpt)

Ramsuresh Rampersad

I was asleep, dreaming I was on an open highway driving a car to some destination I couldn't get to, when the phone rang unexpectedly. Everyone in my circle knew I worked the twelve-hour night shift and, like an owl, slept during the day. I let it ring a few times, hoping the person on the other end would go away.

I answered.

It was for my roommate.

Angrily, "he's working now, can you call back tonight," and hung up without waiting for a reply.

The phone again, ringing...ringing...ringing...ringing.

It was the same distant voice on the other end.

Exasperation, "he's working now!"

Can I give him an urgent message?

"What! Yes, yes, oh, oh, oh, no, oh no, oh no, oh god."

"Yes, yes. I'll let him know."

My anger quickly dissipated, the news had fully awakened me, and it was that which had gotten me out of bed in the middle of my night, and from Brooklyn to Manhattan. But I didn't know how to relay this message to my friend, my roommate and co-worker. How could I break it to him? What could I say?

As I looked through the large windows of a coffee-shop bordering the northeast corner of 96th Street and Lexington Avenue, thinking about this new situation that had popped into my life and how best to deal with it, it started snowing.

I had hoped for snow on Christmas day. It didn't come. I cared little if no snow came on the other days of winter, but Christmas was special, it is the one day I was sure to be off work, and I could then, with peaceful satisfaction—while listening to my favorite Christmas songs—watch nature snow-blanket this great city, outline everything, just like in a Thomas Kinkade painting.

Thinking about the phone call, and having an almost 180-degree view through the glass window walls of the coffee shop, I felt that we all were inside a pretty little snow globe, and New York City itself was part of an even bigger globe, which someone had given a good shake. And now all this silent beautiful snow was raining down on us. How peaceful, how beautiful it looked, all this snow, twisting and twirling, falling at angles, sailing innocently through the air to land on everything.

The winds picked up and steadily increased, blowing southerly along Lexington Avenue, causing the snow to fall at constantly changing angles. Cold air rushed in whenever someone entered the shop, and I wrapped my fingers around the coffee cup. It wasn't fair sometimes—the hand life dealt you from its deck—and who was the dealer anyway? How did some get dealt a flush hand, which they cashed in at the opportune moment and moved on to start bigger things,

while some of us, with the cards we received, were still trying to build a hand as our lives eroded away?

Traffic moved at a slow pace, people, MTA buses, yellow taxi cabs, private cars, and Chinese and Mexican immigrants on bicycles—plastic sheets and opened out black garbage bags, tied like bonnets around their heads and down their torso to keep dry—pedaling as fast as they could through the almost blinding snow to deliver food to someone stuck in their apartment.

Despite the heavy blanketing snow, people were getting on with their lives, and while some were coming from somewhere, others were trying to get to somewhere else, and as always, an ordered rush, an expected suddenness of thrust and movement on every street and avenue, gave the city a beat, a pulse, a rhythm, that kept it so dynamic, so brilliant, and so alive.

From the four subway entrances, or exits, at the corners of Lexington and 96th Street—into the falling snow, every few minutes, a rush of New Yorkers, like an army of angry fire ants, poured out of their disturbed subterranean nests—umbrellas, colorful jackets, hoods pulled tightly over their heads, scarves, hats, gloves, hands buried deep in the warmth of pockets—and onto the sidewalks and roadways, adding texture to the idea of my pretty snow globe.

As steady flows of people came in and out of the coffee shop, I tried to imagine I could somehow step out of myself for a moment and look at myself—what would I see? Would it be the way I imagined other people saw me? Or would I be a stranger to me? And if I were objective enough, what would I come to learn about myself, that I was a lonely, worried, middle-aged man brooding over a cup of coffee? It made me question, do we really know ourselves as we think we do?

Nothing blocked the winds from coming down 96th Street that went east, past Lexington, Third, Second, and First Avenues, then under the Franklin D. Roosevelt East River Drive, to end at the East River; and the tall buildings lining both sides of the street, channeled the strong unhindered winds gushing over the river, in the reverse direction.

Across the intersection, just beyond Affiliated Supermarket, on the southwest corner of 96th Street, I could see the fruit seller's stall on the edge of the sidewalk near the roadway directly under a street lamp. As I looked in that direction, I had that momentary feeling again: that we were all really inside a snow globe, and in it, the fruit seller Rohan—an Indian emigrant who was doing his best to secure the makeshift plastic covering he had tied above the fruit stall to protect the fruits and vegetables—was somewhere warmer. . .

Charles Matusik Fiction Contest, Second Place Award, 2013 Literary Arts Festival, New York City College of Technology, CUNY

Nominating faculty: Professor Sean Scanlan, English 2000, Department of English, School of Arts & Sciences, New York City College of Technology, CUNY.

Cite as: Rampersad, R. (2014). The snow globe (an excerpt). *City Tech Writer*, 9, 91-92, Online at <https://openlab.citytech.cuny.edu/city-tech-writer-sampler/>