

Due to the circumstances surrounding Lord Ganesh's insatiable thirst, I was skeptical of the supernatural. This mattered very little to my boyfriend Pravan as he dragged long footprints across the wall-to-wall carpeting in his grandmother's old room. I sat lotus position on her bed while the scent from her funeral, a cloying mixture of incense and flowers, wafted up from my sari pleats. I smelled it on Pravan too, clinging to the fibres of his black suit. It overwhelmed him so that he looked like a child playing at mourning. His grandmother's coffin had been fed into the crematorium furnace and he had wilted like the spinach in my mother's saag, cell walls collapsing with heat. Now, at his parent's house a few blocks from the funeral home, we readied ourselves upstairs before joining his grandmother's wake in the basement. I had already spent three nights petting Pravan's head while absorbing his snot and tears, and my bandwidth for compassion was stretched taut. Grandmothers die.

Pravan rubbed his brow, smudging the red and white lines painted on his forehead. "I thought you knew. Shower after funeral, always."

I shook my head.

"You have to ward off the spirits. Like washing off ghosts," he said.

I wondered whether ghosts might not be waterproof, but seeing Pravan's shoulders raised in defence, I kept my irritation to myself. "I didn't bring a change of clothes."

He dropped onto the bed next to me. "Is it that big a deal?"

The nakedness of his expression was enough to shame me and I agreed to the strange ritual.

Pravan was a believer in the road most travelled and enjoyed faith without the burden of reason. Over our eight months of dating, he had refused to accept knives or scissors from my hand, convinced it would sever our relationship. Once, he accused me of creating an inauspicious departure after I called him back to our apartment to hand him his lunch. His thesis defence had been riddled with anxiety after I lined his car with newspaper to soak up excess snow. Feet on paper! Chi! Inviting Ma Saraswati's wrath. My five-year-old niece loved dress-up and make-believe, so I was accustomed to this type of imaginary play. "We are flying mermaids," my niece would say. "We can't cut our nails on Sunday," Pravan would say. And I would comply with a mother-like indulgence.