

LINES

by Scott Williamson

Twenty million people live in this city.

And the other day, I think I saw you.

Bathed in darkness. Lying on the couch. Smoke escapes my lips, dancing amidst the lights from the towers shining through the window.

You wouldn't approve. Luis and I always had to smoke our cigarettes when you weren't there. We both wanted you. But he just wanted to fuck you. I respected you. You were smarter than the both of us.

You could be a real self-righteous bitch about it. Tobacco was too far but weed was fine, huh? What about when Luis laced his with cocaine? You could see he was killing himself. Shit, you didn't even go to his funeral.

Smoke pounds my lungs. This is different. I'm not an addict like Luis was. My cravings don't control me. I will choose my death, and the smoke that I exhale adds exclamation.

Was that really you I saw late last Thursday? Did you flee when you saw me looking up at the suicide clinic? I wasn't planning to go in. It was just morbid curiosity. You can see them through the windows, people like you and me sitting, waiting patiently to die. A nurse comes out and takes them away past a dividing white line.

I never saw your face. It was that perfume you always used to wear and that gait you always used to affect. I could sense that it was you. I'm like an animal. I always wanted to touch you, and you never let me. Maybe that's what drove me to you and your scent.

I was slowed by the press of people but I chased you up the stairwell to the empty maglev chamber. You crossed the yawning threshold in the middle of the room, a second before me, and you were about to turn...

The maglev came, silent, and opened on the other side. When it left, you were gone.

I watched it go, mind numb. A strip of neon cut through the world as it left me. The light shined on the side of that maglev so that it could be easily seen in the dark. A line to follow across the city, above the gutters and through the past, decaying with ivy but scented like you.

Was that even you I saw?

I'm going to end up like Luis soon.

I want to see you one last time. Please.

I heard a street preacher once say we're all connected. Twenty million people live in this city, all following their own paths, but expanding from one source, growing like a tree, like the Web, like fiber-optics and ivy. Branches traced in neon and seething with old hurt.

Maybe you can see those lights outside too. And maybe, somewhere deep inside you, you can hear the past calling in a broken voice.

Can you hear me?