

### On The Table

I was using Tim's shoulder as a chin pad. I was sure if I told Tim how hard each breath came my chest would tighten into a long flat line. I just needed water. I put a fish mouth over the neck of a bottle and squeezed the "o" in "Arrowhead" into a winking zero. I pinched the skin on my arms and the fat on my breasts and breathed from my gut.

Tim was looking out the train window, apparently fine. He said the farm flats look like the Savanna and I said I'm a six out of ten, what are you?

Tim was a one point five. He petted me absent-mindedly. Across the field and running parallel to us was a train so old it was a locomotive. It burped black clouds of smoke that stuck and spread in the sky like clumps of stretched wool.

"You know who loves trains?" I said "The Germans."

"Yeah," said Tim. "We need to lock that thing in a museum."

Tim and I were headed to the city because he was starting to feel stuck and I was starting to feel like gum on his shoe. I always told Tim that we were a sure thing but sometimes it felt like he was calling my bluff. He'd get shifty, looking for a fuse, and blow up in a very quiet way. Then he'd go quieter and quieter, mute until I threw myself at him enough times and at enough angles until we were over and under each other again. I liked when we got urgent. Every time I felt surer of our sure thing. It felt waterproof, no consequences, a perfect zip lock bag.

At first this time seemed like all other times. Tim sort of slipped away while standing right next to me and I feigned polite, concerned questions like I didn't know. I rubbed myself on him and told him I wanted his babies. I said mean things then got lockjaw then stole his wallet. I lied about bedding women. A month went by and Tim was furiously quiet. I said why don't we do acid, we've never done acid, and Tim said no but then he said fuck it. We took little white squares and a big steely train and headed straight for the city.

The row in front of us in a commotion. It was about crochet. An elderly lady was picking on her neighbor's loose stitch like a pedantic mom. Her neighbor was a middle-aged man that looked like a young man. He could have been a fun uncle or cool teacher or day drunk. He was telling her that he lived in China and she was telling him that her son's wife was Korean.

"Not that I could tell, it all sounds the same to me."

"You have to listen for the vowels," he told her. "Korean is rounded – a, ya, o, yo, u, yu."

"Tim," I whispered. "Tim, you think he knows Korean?"

Tim looked at the neighbor and his 50ml vodka, his two-toned glasses, his Broncos haversack.

"Nope." Tim returned to the window.

I stuck my tongue in Tim's ear. Tim always said he was from the city but I was bored as hell too. We were nowhere, stuck between corn fields and hay barrels, on layaway until we made our money or lost our minds. My life was nine to five, nine to fries, nine to five, burgers. The only yellow around was vegetable oil and I hadn't heard Korean in a year.

I worked at a burger joint that wanted to be a beer garden that was really a sports bar. Tim got me the job by flirting with the manager and I thought it'd be money in the bag. The first day the manager asked if I was North Korean. I said if I was North Korean I'd be dead right now and she said is that no? I knew that the manager was third generation but I asked her how she got by in Mexico. She was mad and Tim was pissed but I only did dishes for a week.

The truth was, I got the fat drunk men more fat and more drunk and she hired a girl she liked even less. I got my eyes to touch like my hands. I wore shorts that made my butt look like two tight fists and made every guy feel like David Bowie. Anytime I felt like throwing up or throwing drinks I pocketed bills. Tim wasn't a fan and we'd fight about it.

He'd say, "They're paying you to act like a slut."

And I'd say, "I only wanna fuck you baby, I only wanna fuck you."

I decided to give the neighbor eyes to see if he spoke Korean. My chest was pinched like a fat man in a belt. I kept having to pull my breasts apart so my heart had space to beat but I thought it might seem sexy, I was playing with myself.

The neighbor looked at me easy enough. I wanted him to say annyeonghaseyo but he kept taking to the elderly lady, splitting his eye between me and the old woman. Just when I thought he might talk he turned away from me completely and took out a hideous five-pound squash. The squash curved in on itself like an ingrown nail and was covered in knobby growths. The neighbor said he went all the way into the country for organic produce like that. He told the old woman how he baked gourds to make the flesh go tender. “After that, they turn creamy. You can poke your finger straight through to the other side.” When the neighbor looked back he eyed me like I might be squash.

The train pulled into our stop and Tim and I got out but there wasn't any city. We stood at the platform looking around and around like idiots. We were surrounded by derelict buildings, old industry, boarded up and broken into.

“First time here?” it was the neighbor.

Tim looked like a dog with its ears up. “First time in a while,” he said.

“The station's been moved. We're just outside the city where land's cheap. Have you heard about the new mall? It's going to be a whale, and all right here.”

The old lady appeared in the doorway of the train and shuffled her feet. She looked back and forth between the gap and the platform. “Olav!” she called. “Olav! Olav, Olav!”

The neighbor excused himself and jogged over. “Susan! Susan you're the next stop!” He placed one hand on her shoulder and one hand in her hand. He stooped to say something in her ear. In waltz position he propelled her back into train.

I tried giving Tim a look that said Olive? O-Love? Olav? but Tim just said what.

Olav reappeared from the train and jogged back to us. “I can show you two into the city if you want. I'm on my way out.”

I was now a solid seven. It was late afternoon in late summer and the walk into the city was scorching. The sun reflected off every windshield and white line and hit my eyes like dodgeballs. Olav said he had just come from our part of nowhere. He referenced his squash. Tim said oh yeah? and talked about the country like it was a sad shared childhood. I said zip. I felt like a cat on a leash and now I was going blind.

We were a few blocks from the city when I had had it. Tim and Olav had started with country gourds and had moved to African beans. Olav had just come back from Ethiopia where the coffee was unbeatable. He took out his phone and I thought he might be selling something but he was hugging a black man and a gun on a mountain. He was in all white drinking coffee on the ground. He was on the back of a motorcycle in front of a hut in front of a blue sky. Tim looked caffeinated and I couldn't see my boyfriend. I turned to Olav.

“Thanks Olav – is that Nordic or something? Thanks.” Olav said that it was Norwegian but he wasn't Norwegian. He started saying his sister had a Polynesian name even though she wasn't Polynesian, but I gave another dry thanks. I said we could find the city from here. I stopped walking and Tim stopped walking and Olav made to leave then pivoted.

“Are you Japanese?”

He was close enough.

I watched for Asian with the passion of a birdwatcher. Asian or Asia or Asians. Tim said I had yellow fever. I said look who's talking or so? It was our favorite foreplay.

I'd say a few Korean words and claim all of Asia. Tim would salute me or say yes ma'am and we'd run around like cats and dogs, snapping at love like it was a bra strap. We were playing an old game older than us. Biracial babies, Korean porn, I thought that was proof of security. Tim would start chasing me, teasing me, but by the end I was at his heels and on his toes. I forgot stamina. He'd say quit it instead

of get outta here and sit there, bored and overstimulated. I'd go cold and lonely. I'd say fuck you in English, fuck you in Korean, you've always been pretty, I miss my mom.

Things came to a head when I found a file of dirty photos on his laptop. Each toothpick was blonde in black and white. I said what is this, Abercrombie in porn? I made him open each photo and said woah woah when he closed too fast. The more ribs and double As I saw the more sunk I felt, like I was a defendant and each blonde a testimony against me. By the end I was wrung and could only cry while Tim told me I was exactly his type.

Olav had the blue eyes the black and white blondes must have had. He dressed smart and talked quick and didn't know a word in Korean. I couldn't tell if he knew my head was a slow blinking light. We walked into the city and he pointed out monuments like it was his job.

"You know what that building is over there?"

Tim didn't know.

"U.S. Bank Tower. First in the state and largest building in the city." "See those sculptures by the fountain?"

I did.

"Know what they are?"

I didn't and didn't care but Tim was interested.

"Frogs. Funky little frogs."

The frogs had chicken legs and human faces and were trapped somewhere on the tadpole spectrum. They were bronze and two feet high and and when we walked up to them I made one a stool.

"Is there food on this tour?"

Olav pulled out his phone. "Wait till you see this." Pizza and cheesecake and challah and beef wellington. Chow mein and poached fish and scotch eggs and spring rolls. Crocheted beanies and lamb chops and the same smiling selfies.

"You run a blog or something?"

“Pretty good, huh? I’ve cooking for years but just picked up crochet. I’m part of a club.” He showed me a picture of a woman in a lumpy crochet dress. The dress had gaps in the stitching that made her nipples and hips protrude like handles. “That’s Rebecca, she’s in the club too. She was on her honeymoon and bought me a whole bag of Merino wool, form Italy. I mean, on her *honeymoon* and thinking about me.”

“What about challah? Not cheesecake, I’m Asian.”

Olav honked like I made a wrong answer. “We get it, Korea.”

Tim haha-ed and I said lactose.

“What’s there even to do in the city?” I didn’t want to see toads or get to know towers. We had been walking for a long time. My feet felt like the bottoms of my shoes were cut out, no soles, pads on pavement. Olav didn’t stop. This was the new metro line. That had good sushi. This was in that Jolie movie. There was the pedophile hotel.

“What?”

Olav pursed his lips and raised his eyebrows, uh-huh. “The bar underneath is the only one far enough from school zones. Half-mile, state law.”

“How would you know?”

“FBI.Gov/sex-offender-registry. Just me?” Olav pointed to a building across the street. “See that? They have some really nice girls after ten.” He glanced at me then whispered in Tim’s ear. I said hey hey hey.

“What? What he say Tim? What? You think I don’t like girls? What you’d say?”

We passed a restaurant with a hostess in a shrunken shirt. I looked once and back twice and thumbed in her direction. “She’s cute.”

“Oh, Ariana?” Olav shrugged. “She thinks she’s cuter than she is.”

A cop was walking the block ahead of us and Olav said what do you think? He looked like a boy who flooded anthills. He ran yelling Officer, Officer! while Tim said shit and I said oh fuck oh fuck.

I was looking around but Tim caught my hand and walked us over. Olav covered his mouth as he talked to the cop. He looked at us and pointed.

When we reached Olav he beamed. "There they are! I was just telling Officer Aron about my friends from out of town, Tim and his girl." Olav winked and I swallowed spit. I felt like an eight but could have been a seven so I must have been a nine. Olav told the cop that we were starving. He said where would you go if you were starving? Officer Aron didn't look like he used a lot of hyperbole. He slid his hands down the straps of his chest pack. He looked from Olav to Tim to me. "Fanny Ann's," he said. "I'm a sucker for the Jiffy Burger."

My chest was still gunning blocks later. I felt like a shook can of coke. I grabbed Tim's hand and squeezed it over my breast. Olav said Jesus Korea and I said Jesus you, what the fuck, what were you thinking.

Olav said I know what you mean. He took out his phone. He showed me a drawing of a cop in a KKK hood with Blue Lives Murder written in bullet holes. He touched my arm and said don't worry, I'm an ally. I said what? *What?*

I walked behind Tim the rest of the way to Fanny Ann's. I was a cat on a leash again. Olav wouldn't shut up about I don't know what and every now and then he'd look back smiling saying isn't that right? I'd say what and Olav would say *wow*. After a couple times I stopped saying anything and flipped him off when he looked back. Olav still smiled.

On our way to Fanny Ann's we passed a couple trying to take a selfie. They started and stopped and started and looked around. Olav slid up to them with the ease of a big brother. He said I got it and had their phone in his hands before they could yell or pose. He leaned right left and squatted low on the ground. He said hold her waist, nice, kiss? When he handed back the phone the couple said *wow* and Olav flicked the air.

I grabbed Tim and said us next. Olav pulled out his phone and snapped a picture. He said I need numbers.

Fanny Ann's was in oldtown. It was easy to tell where oldtown started and downtown stopped because asphalt braked suddenly for dirt. There were horses pulling wagons, barrels piling taffy, signs that shouted WANTED or GOLD.

Fanny Ann's looked like the inside of a pinball machine. The walls were covered in license plates and road signs, taxidermy and horseshoes, pin up girls and cowbells. Christmas lights twined over cacti planted into the banister. Wagon wheels hung like chandeliers and dangled next to motorbikes descending from the ceiling. The bar was blue and the floor was red and everything looked purple.

Tim gave his order to a bartender in a bow tie. The bartender was bald and handsome and his eyes laughed meanly as he poured a woman who looked like puff pastry another drink. The woman was drunk and wore a sash that said Bride to Be. She said if this one doesn't work out, I'm not getting a fourth.

Olav nudged me while we were waiting for Tim. "Hey. See those two?" He was pointing to a pitbull and a woman in something sexy. "Hooker. I can smell it. Smell that?"

"Smell what?"

"That," Olav said, and poked a pushing finger into my vagina. Tim walked up as Olav poked. Tim looked at me as I looked at Olav as Olav looked at Tim.

When I started at the burger joint Tim told me he'd go after any guy who touched me if I said so. I rolled my eyes and felt smug but when Olav touched me I didn't say anything. I just looked at Olav until Olav looked at me. Olav looked curious and grave. He looked like he was saying how was that.

Tim and I split the Jiffy Burger. There was peanut butter between the buns and it was a good call. Olav watched us eat like he had cooked the burger himself. He asked if it was good and I bite a big bite yes. Olav said he made kimchi burgers. He said he had a picture but I said I don't want that.

Tim stood up when we finished. He nudged me. "We should head out."

On our way out of oldtown we passed a train museum with a line through the front door. The line was tall and blonde and Tim said ask and ye shall receive. He smiled at me and I smiled at him as I leaned into the arm he slung around my waist. I said I'm a five. Olav said you're at least a six. He said I've taken a train from Seattle to San Diego. He said Chinese people are crazy about trains. He said I've lived in China.

When got in front of our train Olav said is this it? Tim said looks like it. We all shook hands like buddies or businessmen. Olav said I have a website. Tim and I climbed the train.

## Science says Love Makes us Crazy

We were meeting at the park. It was a lovely day, the kind that makes me sleepy so I can't see it or makes me crazy so I can't stand it. People were out, idle and sun-worshipping, while I was restless, listless, drowsy. I had been sitting on a bench for so long that my leg had fallen asleep. Rubbing leaves sounded like the tingle I felt in my right foot. I was waiting on you. You were late, you explained later, because you mistook a girl in a ponytail for me.

“But I wasn't sure, I have never seen you in a pony. I thought ‘that's new, that's nice’.”

You complimented not-me on her dangly tail.

Another time, it was early and I was up in your bed hungry. I would not wait. My stomach was declarative. It woke you up.

“I'm hungry.”

“Mmm.”

“Food,” I tugged on your arm, I dimpled your skin with prodding fingers.

“What you want?” Sleep still clogging your throat.

“Toast.”

“I don't have a toaster. You'll have to pan fry it.”

I am waiting on you in the library. Two hours ago we planned to meet here for sex. This cliché is our right.

Inside my backpack is a toaster (commissioned, recycled, pillaged, rescued) from the dumpster of my place of work. My hair is in a pony and baby hairs are circling my face like flies. This, unequivocally, is seduction. Maybe love too.

We are fucking in the library bathroom. We scoped two out of four floors and really, it is our only option. Your nervousness excites me. I am delighted that you can, in fact, get it up.

We are using the larger handicap stall and stumbling conglomerated, (hand-in-hair, hand-in-pants, lips-on-lips, latticed legs) I guess it is appropriate. You have me pushed against the stall walls. They are black and reflective and mirrors that makes us very sexy in a place of public shits. You come fast but it is necessary and praise.

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I want to: dunk you in paint and roll you in dirt until you are a Drumstick, dairy dessert, cased cream. Find you flirting. I'll punch and we can wrestle until we have sex so desperate it's novel. Piss on your leg so you stink and keep other girls away. Push you into a river, any and every, and take pictures before you pull me in too.

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I'm excitable. I have hours, sometimes days, where I consume and tear and feel all my moving molecules. Particles heave into each other. You can see me vibrate. Priorities break and recombine like chemical reactions. Ionic: I am high and charged and netting big positives.

My therapist called it mania. She's not licensed to talk medication but mentioned ones I might take. I don't have a therapist.

It's good that you're so patient. You yee-haw at my immediacy. You flutter kick as I motor, pulling. When I get like this I take off my glasses. I squeal. Blurred fear and blurring vision makes for air-swimming; I'm walking through paintings. You don't wear glasses and you only shake when you chuckle, swinging your head like you've got swimmer's ear, but you don't scare. We're good news.

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Somehow you fit into every season. When it is cold we go inside under sterility that lights every pore on your face and you help pick off my flakes of dried skin. When it is hot my sandals slip off and you hold my feet, finding every pressure point.

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I told you about the edibles after they started to hit. I climbed down from your couch and onto the floor. My back was to you but I could hear you in the kitchen. You were beating chicken.

“Oh fuck,” I said. “I wore makeup for this.”

We were waiting for it to be late enough to go to Noah’s party. This would be our first. Our “debut,” you joked.

“This is either going to be really good or really bad,” I said.

“Don’t make a scene and it won’t be bad.”

“Me? A scene? I am calm and rational and not aggressive.”

You sat down with a plate of panko chicken and I climbed onto you lap.

“Don’t. pick. Fights.” You bounced me on one knee.

“I might pick fights”

“Don’t pick fights!

“People like the truth!”

“Hardly anyone likes the truth.”

“That’s not true.”

“No,” you agreed

“You like the truth,” I pointed.

“No,” you disagreed.

You said: “I don’t think it will be bad. Not really.”

You were two beers in and I was 10mgs happy.

I'm sure the party was less impressive to you. There were different bands on rotation but the theme was decidedly angst. How do people even dance to punk? I did a lot of weight shifting and head nodding. I did a lot of leaving you with gusto. *Let me be one of the boys!* My ponytail swung, hitting you. I wanted to see if you'd come get me.

You'd get me for the coke. Your buddy's buddy used his military ID to make lines. You were talking literature, debating new canon, while I snorted off a Franz Kafka poster. Your buddy Noah bragged about how much coke you'd done once and I frowned. I couldn't look at you as you bent over Kafka. I couldn't stop looking at you as you sat back down, sniffing.

These were the inevitable moments I worried about, like that time we went backcountry camping, not by choice. We didn't plan and didn't get a campsite. We spent the night over rocks on a mountain below freezing. I was bloated. Top Ramen kept me gassy all night. In the morning I asked you to drop me off at my house. I needed to get away.

I stood abruptly. "I'm gonna catch the last set." I patted your knee. I left and on my way to punk ran into your buddy's buddy's buddy.

"Want to get a better view of the show?" I followed him out the sliding door, through the yard, between a fence, into a spare bedroom. The room was empty and that made me nervous. I was two kinds of high but all kinds of cynical. I picked up a glass Heineken.

"Close the door." He turned and crossed the room. I obeyed, lifting the Heineken. I was thinking of your name. He opened another door that lead to punk as I inverted the bottle into a bat, readying it at his head, spilling beer down my front.

"Oh," I choked. "I'm so sorry. I'm so so sorry."

I missed the last set trying to find you.

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I'm going to follow you around. Careful, that's power.

Say Wyoming. I'll like fishing hats and meat. I can buy winter clothes. Somewhere I have a wildlife guide for Yellowstone. We can hike and mountain bike and I will lose my mind but it's so empty I can just yell, spook the trees. We'll do fishing trips that you'll finish because I'm too impatient. I'll do the deboning, probably, but might just fry fish whole.

Do you like Puerto Rico? We can work hospitality while my parents weep. We'll eat plátanos and rum and I'll curse because my metabolism isn't yours. We both took Spanish. You don't brown but you could brighten a couple shades red. Puerto Rican women are beautiful – only I'm allowed to blush.

Don't pick London, please.

Every eyelash, shooting star, and coin in fountain I wish for us. That's prayer.

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"No offense," I began, "but you have reptilian eyes."

"None taken."

"They're almost feline. You know Ripley's Believe it or not? Cat Man? Like that."

I showed you a picture. A man more monster than cat with tattooed tiger stripes and metal studs screwed in like whiskers. He had his mouth open in a hiss, flashing long canines, and one hand curled in a claw.

"What? No way." You paused to laugh and think. "A drunk lady once told me my eyes looked evil," you offered.

"Oo. Yeah. Definitely."

This was early on, at coffee, as friends. I had a boyfriend but I was flirting with you girlishly. I told my roommate I was weirdly attracted to you. I told my boyfriend you had a receding hairline. Even Jude Law has a widow's peak.

As friends we went to the zoo and I couldn't believe the sadness. Animals were lethargic and caged and pissing. Children were running, yelling, ruining any nobility. A woman was recording a chimpanzee shitting in a tree.

"Babies are ugly, they look like gnocchi." I was eyeing a young family. I needed coffee.

You laughed like I was joking and squeezed my shoulders. You slung a hand around my waist and tugged me, inefficiently, towards Zoofari Café. I was shocked. You had never touched me liked that. I pulled away. Fear and guilt and pleasure all flush.

When we left the zoo I asked to see your place. You live alone. You said you were a writer, a reader, a dog-owner. I wanted confirmation. You own a lot of books and your dog is very cute. We lingered.

"You're quiet," I said, an accusation.

You sighed. "I want to kiss you right now. I do." Why would you say something so stupid? You stood there a little sad while I seethed. My parents tried to teach me moderation. Before I left I got naked and on top of you.

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We were sitting on your couch. I wasn't smushed up against you but I wanted to be. We were in one of those dips, potholes of conversation. The only sound was your chewing dog. Really chewing – all slobber – on a fake bone. She's in love, eating so hard the plastic's melting. I hear dogs take after their owners. How awful.

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I mourned when I fell in love with you. The revelation was terrible. I was so good with men, I was like Cesar Millan or an exterminator. Goodbye fucking, goodbye boys. Devotion makes losers. I blamed and bullied you.

You asked me out to dinner and we went Thai. It was mid-winter and cold, but inside the restaurant was hot and stuffy. Lights were dim but I felt spotlighted. Footsie wasn't working. Green curry was too rich. Your fast eating was annoying but helpful in stuffing awkward silence. You made attempts. You told me about a peer who was accomplished and cultured and beautiful. She had won some fancy award. "She's full of herself but so smart and pretty that you just think 'god damnit' and keep listening."

I excused myself to the bathroom. This was your first mistake.

When I returned a check had arrived. You were forking out your wallet. "Two cards down sound good?" This was your second mistake.

Walking out of the restaurant was a relief. Nighttime licked my face and froze the two burners on my cheeks. Was I okay, you asked. Your question popped my silence like pimples.

"Are you fucking kidding me? You don't understand. I'm jealous. I'm crazy. I'm crazy, I'm crazy about you! I really really like you." We were in the parking lot of a convenience store and I was yelling, pushing you into your car. Three months ago I was a sweet girl.

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Gung-ho is overwhelming. "I'm just processing," you told me. I made a face.

I used to be the engine you take to the shop, sputtering and in need of cajoling. I never liked my drivers enough to work for them. I scream now, alive, hot, automatic, no-hands needed. Self-driving cars are terrifying. How do you tell a machine that just eats and eats road “stop”?

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I’m talking about your body. It’s unremarkable. It’s sturdy and hairy and full of sweat traps. “You’re so pretty,” I told you. All true.

The first time I saw your blonde armpit I cried. You have brown arm, leg, head, and pube hair. I wasn’t ready.

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You weren’t surprised when a comedian called you spooky. We were in a comedy club but the place looked ready for strippers. We were sitting near the stage and I kept expecting to see Cherry flash her legs and shake her ass.

“We’re going to a strip club next,” I said.

The show was equal parts truck stop and bachelor party. A man next to me was drunk and interjecting and cramping with laughter. The rim of his beer can was wet with spit and not condensation. I was missing Cherry but know that I’m glad we went.

You drove us back in night in silence. By then you could sense my moods and it smelled like rain was coming. You spoke once, asking for gum, and I pressed a mint rectangle into your lips. I used one hand to mix fingers with you and the other to crumple your gum wrapper. Our eyes were on the road and while you watched for cars, I watched the broken white lines that ran at us, so fast. My clamminess was compacting the wrapper, small and dense and a pearl in my palm.

“I just want you to be content, to live neat. Not not exciting but not messy.” I hesitated.  
“If I was religious I’d pray for your soul.”

Broken white was really coming fast and tears were making tracks. “I think I’ve always wanted to love someone totally and hopelessly.” *Oh god. Oh god oh god oh god.* I cried with noise. I fingered the pearl and thought: *I’m going to hold his trash. It doesn’t matter, I’m going to carry his trash.*

My left arm had gone completely numb but I squeezed your hand until we got home. I was making a promise. Summer rain.

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I’m not a good ambassador.

“Only child! You know what they say,” nudge, wink. “You must be spoiled rotten.”

“It’s true.”

I don’t wait well. When I have nothing to say the conversation is over. Even “excuse me,” minimum, is script and unnatural. I want to flee. To get up and out, wordlessly. Silent acts of dismissal are the most offensive. Middle fingers, break-up texts, child neglect. *You’re not worthy.* The impulse remains.

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I have a prescription:

For you, for me

Any day

Barefoot running

Until tired, as needed

Human bodies are not meant to run. We look like chicken bodies, our pumping arms clipped wings. When you run your body releases endorphins like when you break bones or fall down. Your body is there with a pillow, cursing and catching you.

We were walking your dog when I broke into a sprint. We had been having hiccups all week and I was a body of insecurity. I rounded a corner ahead of you and saw a cat spray a bush then slink straight through it. He was offering me his paw, by way of demonstration.

No shoes, no jacket, just bare feet. I shed as I ran away from you. Over sidewalk and road and sticks that made me slow I ran to open green space.

Bare feet on grass is celebratory, kissing. I am reminded I am natural and earth-made in a way that's like coming home. I run until I exhaust and let flies try my sweat.

I didn't know how you'd take it. I returned to find you sitting on a stool outside your front door. You looked happy to see me, waiting with jazz and no shirt.

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After our first fight, you texted: "I love you. You're crazy and fearless and leap before you look and I love you."

I sent you a picture of a strawberry. Grown, ribbed, puckered, bloody.

I texted: "Don't you just want to eat it?"

How I feel about you."

## Pears

My mother sleeps like a raincloud or a ghost - all grey and white - on a jade bed with a prayer book tucked underneath her pillow. Every morning she wakes young, a curled fetus, and grows into a kneeling child. On the cold jade in a hard room she reads her prayer book, rosary round her wrist.

My mother paid too much for a mattress that hurts her knees, hurts her ankles, hurts all her boney toes. She kneels and prays as her bones bark, threatening to pestle to powder. Jade is unkind to collagen, but, very good luck. In the morning she reads what she could recite and cycles through 59 beads, fingering each wooden sphere, smudging them with intent. "I tell God about you everyday," she tells me. She knocks on my forehead with the back of her hand. "So He remembers."

After prayer my mother goes into the bathroom, grows, colors herself a young woman. She pats and tucks and puckers up. She likes hot cheeks and angry lips. "Red is the color of love," she says.

My mother is still in the bathroom when I arrive at her apartment. I switch into house slippers and go to the kitchen with a box of Asian pears.

The entrance to her kitchen is blocked by an old refrigerator, stoic and humming, a guard that squeezes walkway and commands her galley. In the early morning her kitchen is dark, a closed eye, the fridge more shadow than solid. I walk fast and hit. The fridge shakes and the box falls and I become an alarm. I can hear golden orbs tumbling in their Styrofoam sleeves. The thud of Asian pears is bruising, terminal. In the dark I crawl on cold tile, hands hungry.

I return the pears to their box and sit with it on my knees. The kitchen floor is as narrow and dooming as the bottom of a canyon. The tile grout smells sedimentary, something to scratch

at and make silt. Appliances drone slowly and deeply, as if in a coma, dead until someone roughs a button.

My mother told me fear begins in the belly. Fear sits in your stomach like a pile of rocks and you grow heavy as a tomb, twisted as a tree root. When I was afraid my mother put her hands on my boulder-baby. “Breathe here,” she’d say. She bought me Sprite and told me about rocks she saw on a special about volcanoes. “Full of bubbles.” She said knowingly. “The bubbles break the rock.”

In the bathroom I hear my mother picking lips. She has a tray full of bullets with sultry names. Ruby, Fireball, Raspberry, Roe. “Nara, Nara, Na-ra,” she calls. Rouge, Rebel, Runway, Danger. “Yes Ma, in the kitchen.” Chili, Cherry, Russian, Retro. “Don’t forget pears, pears for Dr. Kim.” Riddle, Retrograde, Marilyn, Velvet. She walks into the kitchen. “Omo omo, why is it so dark in here?” I get to my feet as she turns on the lights. My mother gasps and jumps back. “Aigoo,” she beats her chest with a fist “you scared me! What are you doing? Quick, quick,” she waves her red lipstick. “The pears, Nara. He loves them.”

## When I Said We Should Sleep With Other People

I laid on his chest listening to his heart click. I heard a leaf blower outside, the words of a friend saying, “the world’s ending and leaf blowers are what we’re left with.”

“You’re very quiet,” he said. I looked up at him. I thought *puppy eyes*, I thought *eyes are the sewers of the soul*, I thought *look away*.

“I was waiting for you to say a miracle,” he said.

He collected his things, his gadgets.

He said, “I have a lot of work.”

He went into the kitchen. I curled into a ringlet on the bed. I listened to him microwave his coffee, test it, microwave it again. Outside with reverse vacuums there was whistling, men communicating like birds.