

I've taken a lover. My husband doesn't know. Every night, my lover comes and we sit in my living room and talk. We never make it to sunrise, but sometimes I wonder what if we did. What would we do with the whole day ahead of us, and would we turn it into a life together.

I used to judge people who took lovers. But, then I took a lover and realized it was an act of desperation. People who take lovers are the same as kamikaze pilots or suicide-bombers. They would destroy themselves for a cause. I would destroy myself for my lover; I would do it over and over again.

My husband is not home much. He has a lot of friends and works long hours. Sometimes I catch him lying about things. Like the time he told me his friend paid back the loan we gave him, when I know he didn't. My husband says that if I didn't get so angry, he would be more honest with me. He tells me that the way I act makes him not want to come home. I know he's right, but that doesn't mean I don't get lonely all the same.

My lover showed up that first time unannounced. My husband was working on his laptop in bed, and I couldn't fall asleep. I curled up on the sofa with a pillow and blanket. I was drifting off to sleep when I heard the fridge open. I half-opened my eyes and saw a tall shape in the kitchen. I couldn't see too well without my glasses.

"I can't let you sleep here all by yourself," he said, quietly, and sat down on the two-seater nearby. I reached for my glasses, and saw my lover peering over at me with concern.

I blinked my eyes and sat up suddenly.

"You look tired," he said and smiled at me, gently, like we were old friends.

The first night, he held my hand and stroked my hair until I fell asleep. I cried a little. It had been a while since anyone had spent so long on me.

The next morning, I opened the door to my bedroom to find my husband fast asleep in our bed. Thick lashes curled against his rosy cheeks, and his mouth lay open and trusting towards me. I felt guilty about spending the night in my lover's arms.

The next night, my lover was back. I came outside the bedroom for a drink of water. He looked at me like I was the best thing he'd seen all day.

"Hey you," he said, and smiled, relieved.

I went and sat down next to my lover. I studied the hair on the back of his hands. I wondered if I should take this further, or end it there. My lover seemed to know how I felt, and he didn't take my hand. He picked up a book from the coffee table and flipped slowly through the pages.

"That one's my favorite," I said, turning the pages and pointing at a photograph of a chestnut mare laying her head on an old woman's shoulder.

Another photograph showed them standing across a fence, looking at each other. There was a stillness to their eyes and bodies, a privacy they shared. I longed for that.

“These are beautiful,” said my lover and looked directly at me. “You’re very talented.”

I blushed.

“Your husband must be so proud of you,” he said and looked towards the bedroom door.

“He thinks it’s a hobby,” I shrugged and sat back against the sofa.

We talked some more. My lover was a good listener, and I loved his hands. Broad and blunt with square fingernails. Like my father’s hands. My lover put his head on my lap, and I stroked his hair. Even my lover needs comforting every once in a while.

I kept on as if life was the same, but I spent every night on the sofa. I couldn’t wait for my lover to get there. He told the best jokes, and his eyes sparkled when he looked at me. He held me in his arms with a sense of wonder. It had been two weeks, and I was really falling for my lover.

I asked my lover where he had been when my husband proposed, where he had been when I had walked down the aisle. He looked at me with so much sadness that I knew it hurt him as much as it hurt me. I knew he wished it had all turned out differently.

“I didn’t even know I existed until I met you,” he told me.

My lover was adventurous. He was daring. He went ice-climbing and cave-diving. He hung tents from vertical faces of mountains and slept on thin air. I told him that I worried about him every time he went away. He asked me if I’d like him to stop. The way he looked at me, I knew he’d do it just for me. It made me judicious about what I asked of him, it made me generous.

“Just be careful, is all I’m saying,” I answered and pulled his legs up onto my lap. We fell asleep like that, curled up into each other like macaroni. The sun was just peeking over the horizon.

My husband came home later than usual one night. I was already on the sofa with a blanket and book.

“You’re never in bed anymore,” he said, and put down his bag.

“You’re never home,” I answered. My husband looked at me, surprised.

He walked into the bedroom and I heard the clink of his belt as it hit the floor. After a few moments, he returned. I could feel him looking at me but I kept my eyes looking down until the type blurred before my eyes.

“Can you buy some milk tomorrow?” he asked me.

“Okay,” I said, and put the book down. I lay down on the sofa and closed my eyes until I heard his footsteps shuffle from the room.

When my lover came that night, I wasn't in the right frame of mind. I felt agitated and angry. I snapped at my lover and saw the hurt look on his face. I was being my old self again. I would drive him away just like I had driven away my husband. The next night, my lover didn't show. I was heartbroken. I jumped at every sound, I kept checking the front door. I lay on the sofa in a sad puddle all day. I had never felt so lonely in my whole life.

The next evening, I put on the television and flipped through magazines because I didn't want to show how afraid I was that my lover wouldn't show. It was already half past midnight when I heard the door open. I whipped around. My husband walked inside. I glared at him, angry that he was not my lover. He looked at me sheepishly, even though he had done nothing wrong. I hoped my lover had not seen him, and I sat down on the sofa and picked up a magazine.

"Are you going to sleep out here again tonight?" he asked.

I shrugged.

"I can put away my work early tonight and maybe we can watch a movie or have a glass of wine."

I told him that I had some work to do, and took out my proofs. I stared at them until my husband went back into the bedroom. My lover never showed, so I slept on the floor. I wanted to show him that I would sleep on a bed of nails if I had to.

The next night, I was so exhausted with worry that I blew it when my lover showed up. I talked and laughed too loudly. My lover stared at me quizzically but he went along with it. Our conversation petered out within the hour. I could tell his mind was somewhere else. My lover left earlier than usual that night, and I knew it was ending.

It was a relief that my husband didn't notice that I was falling apart. We ate our bowls of cereal in silence over the morning paper, and he patted me on the head before leaving for work. It was nice that my husband did not notice my unkempt hair or ratty pyjamas. I did not have to worry about being my best self. I went into the bathroom and saw my husband's towel crumpled on the floor. I picked it up; it smelled like Old Spice. He had worn that in college when we had met. I remember the first time I had seen him. He was sitting on the stone bleachers in the commons, his elbows on his knees, waiting for a friend. He had broad shoulders and thick waves of hair curling against his collar. When I saw him in the back row of my chemistry class later that week, I went and sat down next to him. I always sat in the front row, but from that day on, I stayed in the back.

My husband and I used to do everything together, mostly because I wanted to be with him, and he always wanted to be doing something. Once we settled down, I thought he would too, but he kept going. I got left behind. I got so angry staying at home, making the beds, cooking the meals, all by myself. I wanted a husband and instead I got trapped. I knew he was mad at me, too, for not making the rounds with him, calling on the friends and family, keeping up appearances. We started living separate lives, but I wasn't angry anymore. I had my lover, and he was everything I had been looking for.

I waited outside in the living room and my lover showed up late. I asked where he had been, and I didn't believe his answer. Traffic? There's never traffic at 2am. I asked him if he was married. He told me that I

was married, so what did it matter. I couldn't believe that my lover was being sarcastic. It was not like him. I was pushing him away. Bad, bad, bad, I told myself. Get your act together. Your lover is all you've got. I told my lover that I was sorry, and could we start over. He said, sure, and put his arms around me. We were both tired, so we fell asleep quickly. We'd catch up tomorrow. There was so much to talk about.

My husband told me the next morning that he knew he'd been busy, but he'd planned a nice weekend trip for us, a little getaway. It's a surprise, he smiled, and I stared at him in mute anger. I hated that pretending smile on his face. It was so fake. I knew that he knew our marriage was a farce. Why was he even pretending, I had stopped long ago. I was going to leave with my lover soon and I could stop pretending. Anyway, my lover and I were spending the weekend together, so I certainly could not go.

My husband pretended to look disappointed, and then got on his laptop. We both knew that's what he wanted to do all weekend anyway. I'd been wearing a lot more makeup. I had dark circles under my eyes from not sleeping enough at night, and I hoped my lover wouldn't notice. I know he doesn't love me for how I look, but I still want to look good for him. I like dressing up for someone. It's more for me than for him.

I bought a new red dress for the weekend. It was our three month anniversary. I put on my favorite perfume and it smelled like jasmine flowers at night. I even wore heels. My lover told me I looked beautiful, and we had wine over candle light. I heard the bedroom door open and was terrified that my husband would see us, but also relieved, because then it would finally be over. My husband didn't even notice us in the living room. I heard the toilet flush and the bedroom door close, and then silence. My lover and I talked about our future. We would move to Istanbul, because I had always wanted to live there, and then to Sweden, because he'd gone on exchange there in high school and had always wanted to go back.

"What will we live on?" I asked.

"You'll write for travel magazines and I'll teach at those international schools."

I smiled, and we clasped hands. We'll do whatever it takes, as long as we're together, we murmured to each other.

We set the date, and I could feel myself come alive. Even my husband didn't irritate me as much as he usually did. I stopped snapping at him, and I noticed we'd find ourselves in the kitchen, chatting about our days and eating celery stalks with blue cheese dressing. He wasn't so bad. The project he was working on was actually quite interesting, something about computer-simulated logarithms to reduce civilian military casualties. I didn't even know he was working with the government. It's a new project, top secret, which is why I haven't been able to talk about it much, he told me. He looked tired. He raised a celery stalk to his mouth, and I looked away at the gold glint on his finger. I felt sorry for us, but I had moved on already. I thought I'd be extra nice to him since it was our last night together. Even if he hated me after I left, a small part of him might remember how nice I'd been, and maybe he'd hate me a little less. Even though I was done with the man, it didn't mean that I didn't care if he hated me or not.

I kept my packing light. I didn't want it to be obvious that I had left, and I wanted my new life to have very little to do with my old one. I was going to be a new woman. A better woman. I wouldn't tell my

parents either. They didn't adore my husband, but they did not see any reason for me to leave him. He was basically a good guy. I'd send my parents a postcard with no return address, just so they wouldn't worry about me. They could visit us later, when we were in Istanbul, but only after we'd had some time to ourselves. A room to ourselves.

I dragged my suitcase out to the living room and sat down on the sofa. It was only midnight, but I was so excited that I couldn't lie in bed. Ten minutes to two, the bedroom door opened and my husband came out. He looked at me bleary-eyed and asked me why I was still up. He came and sat down next to me, and put his arm around my shoulder. He pulled me to him, kissed me on the side of the head, and called me kiddo. I didn't know what the hell he thought he was doing. He told me that he knew that he hadn't been there for me lately, but that he'd have more time now.

I looked at my watch. It was eight minutes to two. I frantically nodded at him and asked him if we could talk about it in the morning. He put his head down and started to make these heavy breathing noises. He wiped his eyes with his hands, and I realized he was crying. I was horrified. What would my lover think if he saw me on the sofa next to my husband. He'd feel bad for this sad sack of a man, and change his mind. I knew it was now or never with my lover. If we didn't leave tonight, I'd be stuck here forever.

I patted my husband on the thigh and put my arm around his shoulder. I nudged him gently forward, towards the bedroom, but it was like a sack of potatoes was sitting next to me. He kept mumbling and sobbing, and I was beginning to feel distressed myself. I started crying, too, and he put his arms around me and we sort of cried together.

Then, we both trailed off and sat there stunned, breathing heavily. My husband turned to me and kissed me. He started running his hands up and down my back, and tried to slip his hands inside my shirt. Again, I was horrified. I pushed him away and looked at him like he was a stranger groping me in line at the movie theater. He didn't even resist. He just sat there like a lump in the moonlight, and he looked so sad in his stripey pyjamas with his hair sticking up and his face wet and puffy. I wanted to pat him on the back and tuck him into bed. He was not my husband. He wasn't even my lover.

It was now three minutes to two.

"Go to sleep. I just need to finish up a proof sheet," I told him, and gently pushed on his shoulders.

My husband shuffled into the bedroom and the door closed with a soft click.

I was alone at last. I settled myself nicely on the sofa, and arranged my skirt in a pretty fan around me. I clasped my handbag and pursed my lips. I closed my eyes and savored the excitement ballooning in my chest. I knew that this was what I had been waiting for my whole life. I knew that this was the beginning of the rest of my life.

One minute to two. I sat ever so still. Like any movement would shatter the second hand on the clock and stop time.

I heard footsteps walking up to the door, and watched the handle of the door turn. There appeared my lover, a dark outline in the doorway. He stepped into the pool of moonlight and I saw his striped pyjamas and his handsome face, still wet from the night rain.