

Taste of Hope

I used to know a girl. She was slight of height and soft of voice but she sighed warmth into indifference and made children's faces bloom at first sight. Her long, thin fingers made for the delicacy and precision of compassion, she was always too much. Alluring and unpredictable, captivating but transient. Lips velvet and honeyed like cotton candy, her pink tongue carried the bite of a vodka shot. With fire in her throat, she wrung together sentences with the confidence of a broken neck. She was antinomy. I think she was addicted to suffering; I think suffering was addicted to her; she was antimony and I think she was afraid. Afraid to lift the coffin lid long enough to breathe anything other than the perfume of self-immolation. Light comes in waves, but absence is unwavering; and as adventurous as she was, a sure thing was still a sure thing. Everything can be taken except that which is left behind.

Laptop to my left, a bottle of Disaronno to my right. I couldn't write. I couldn't write because I couldn't bring myself to drink. In a fit of frustration, I grabbed my keys and headed out of my apartment. I realized I was crying as I was locking my front door. I knew where I was going, but I was afraid to admit it even to myself.

I hadn't been there since I was nineteen years old. Turn right, U-turn, drive two miles. Turn right again, drive one mile. First complex on the right. He lived in the last building, in the room facing the pond. The pond was dirtier than I remembered, and shallower, too. The water was brown and there was trash floating in it. I walked to his floor, stood one door away from where he used to live. Everything was different, but I knew exactly where I was, exactly what this place signified.

Part of me wanted to knock on the door, ask the new owners if I could see Room D. I didn't want to see the window from across the pond or look at the front door from ten feet away. I wanted to touch his old bedsheets, smell the salt, smell the iron. Feel the carpeting on my hands, on my knees. I wanted to stand facing his bathroom mirror, hands on the edge of the sink, like I did those years ago. Bruises, blood. Swollen lip. I remember a caricature staring back. The right side of my neck looked like Rorschach test and my hands were shaking. I wanted to stand in the exact spot in that bedroom where I lost everything; because, more than anything, I wanted to finally come to terms with what happened to me that night, the night that split my life, split me, into Before and After.

My stomach's been upset for months; there's so much to say. Thank yous and I'm sorrys claw at the back of my throat. Lost in my medicated fog, I'm trapped somewhere between a veil of normalcy and alcoholic Freudian slips. My mind's a black hole and I'm 300 milligrams away from the event horizon. I think of my demise and see my mother's sad, sad eyes. Instant tears, ready to overflow.

"That's my greatest fear."

"What is?"

"That you'll take your own life." Voice crack. Hers or mine?

It's been five years since that chilly October night. Most people recover and treatment is always available. I know; I've heard it before. Neat, practiced smile. Would you like a pamphlet? Let me go home. It's been five years. Sure, I've made progress; yeah, recovery isn't linear. But maybe I'm not the fortunate majority. Maybe I'm part of the percentage of people who don't get better, who don't recover. Who suffer for as long as they can withstand the allure of sturdy rope.

Maybe that's *my* biggest fear. Voice crack. My rational personality plays ping pong with my major depression.

Sometimes I people-watch while I wait for my morning train. Haggard faces, under eye bags, rough hands. Calluses, missed calls, middle-aged smiles. What keeps people going? Why do people live, choose life? Maybe the average person doesn't explicitly think about why. Or maybe they've thought about it so deeply and so profoundly that resilience is no longer a choice. Maybe the only reason I think about why is because my black dog is poorly trained. Achtung!

Rape makes you bad at love. I met a boy whose hands feel like warm sand at the beach. His eyes gently graze over my skin, planting seeds with lingering kisses whispered. I think about his taste for days and I could fall in love with his lips alone. But rape makes you bad at love. I frequently wonder if he thinks of me as often as I think of him. Do the young always err on the side of hopelessness? Ping pong, ping pong. Wanting to be loved aches.

Words to my future spouse: I hope you exist. When we lie side by side, softly at night, I hope you kiss the scars on my wrists and tell me I'm beautiful. How gentle are your fingertips? What is it you see when you look into my eyes? How it must feel to search, unflinchingly. What it must feel, to breathe safely in sync.

The day I defeat the last of my demons, I hope we celebrate. I hope you wrap your hands around the small of my back and kiss me as if my parted lips sigh life and you are suffocating. I hold your face in my hands, in our bedroom quiet, relishing the warmth of your cheeks. You kiss my palm. Using my thumb to slowly trace the outline of your bottom lip, each second lasts an eternity. Does touching me make you nervous?

Feeling your pulse beneath the soft skin of your neck, nothing exists outside this moment.
There is only you, and there is only me. And everything was worth it. Right? I hope you exist.