

This is a List of Things I Like:

It was dusk on Wednesday and I was sobbing real hard under the bridge just outside the cul-de-sac. I could see the sliver that was Peter Heilige barreling towards me on his scooter. He rolled up next to my feet as I dabbed at my face with my t-shirt.

“What are you crying for?” he squeaked. Peter was a thin kid with grey holes where his eyes should be.

“My mom and dad were fighting.” My face was hot. “They fight like they don’t love each other.”

“Were they hitting?” Peter dropped the scooter where it stood, paying no mind to how it fell.

“No.”

He looked reassured, but vaguely disappointed. “Then they still love each other. Just a little bit, at least.”

“I don’t think that’s how it goes, Peter.”

Peter’s skeleton collapsed beside me. He picked at the scabs on his blonde knees, staring down at them. He was silent for a long time. “Whenever Dad would hit Momma, I would start to list things I like.”

“You make a list of them?”

“List them in my head, I mean. I would just say them all in my head so loud that I couldn’t hear what he was yelling at her. ‘This is a list of things I like,’ I would say. And then I’d list them right out. Go on. Try it. Do it in your head.”

This is a list of things I like: I like Eggo’s waffles straight out of the toaster oven. I like braids. I like air conditioning. I like walking everywhere. I like people without freckles. I like forgetting to bring a jacket. I like kittens in pet stores. I like tennis shoes. I like tennis matches. I like trampolines over tall grass. I like sleepovers. I like girls. I like cheap mascara. I like falling asleep in the car and waking up in my bed. This has been a list of things I like.

It was mid morning on a Sunday and I was lying face up on an unfamiliar mattress. William Something flicked the bathroom light off and glided back toward the bed.

“You were great, by the way,” he whistled through a subtle smile. William could disappear in the white hue of his sheets, but he was not transparent by any means. Everything about him was opaque.

“Thanks,” I said, scanning the floor for my shirt. It wasn’t a hard find; his side of the room was spotless. There was a stark line of film down the middle of the space, drawing battle lines between William and his roommate. “It’s time for me to go now.”

“No, it’s not. Come on, just one more time.” He stepped down hard on my shirt. His thin smile twisted as his jaw clenched shut. I got a glimpse of what he was thinking.

“No, I have to go,” I insisted as I tugged at it with vague fingers. He could hear me but he wasn’t listening.

Before I could resist, he came over me in a white rush. “Please stop,” I pleaded.

He looked me straight in the eyes, pressed down on my throat, and cooed, “Shhhh, you’re perfect. Stop crying. You’re perfect. You’re perfect...”

This is a list of things I like: I like boys with long hair. I like girls with short hair. I like three parts coffee, one part soymilk. I like movies about young love. I like overflowing shelves. I like sitting on the floor. I like being held when I cry. I like ironic clothing on teenagers. I like the kind of books you read in English class. I like nostalgic tokens. I like walking in urban areas. I like beards. I like really, absurdly tall people. I like CVS at 3:00 A.M. I like dead flowers pressed in books. I like people that are bad at lying. I like wearing other people’s clothes. I like overstaying my welcome in public. I like being carried. I like swearing. I like really hot showers. This has been a list of things I like.