

To my 18 year old self,

That tattoo design that looks so good
in the flash book
of the angel peering into a reflection pool and
seeing a mirror image of a demon,

that is nice cover art for a soft-metal band

from the late 80's.

It is not something you should ever consider
getting as a tramp stamp.

Ever.

But some things you have to learn the hard way.

Good luck,

To the woman on the train on the way home from a work meeting,

I thought you liked me.

You stared so hard,
like you were memorizing my body under my red gingham shirt,
like you could see all my imperfections,
separately,
a kaleidoscope of failures.
like you were mining me for soul,
or heart,
or diamonds, or something else I can't afford.

And when I sat next to you
at Jay Street,
you leaned into me,
your mouth close to my ear,
everyone else on the car fell away
and it was just us on the train, you breathed -

You know you have a nametag on, right?

I melted.

To the woman on the West 4th Subway platform,

You don't know why
I cried. It was 3 am, and
the train wouldn't come, and
there were rats on the track.

It was you and me on the heavy wooden bench,
balancing out the ends, like a playground seesaw.

The sharp edged floral of your perfume cut
the smell of piss and sweat,
your
knees below the hem of your black dress glowed like marble,
the tick of your heartbeat tickled the pearls around your neck.

You looked like you should be hailing a cab.

You glanced at me, out of the side of your eyes.

My tears
tasted like whiskey, and snot, and the dirt of a year-long day.

You clutched your purse closer, the
swoop of your neck like a palm in a steady breeze.

When the train came
you stood
turned your head,
looked me full in the face, and said

- hold on dear, just hold on, a little bit longer.

The doors swallowed you, and the train swept you through the tunnel.

So I clung to the bench, willing it to bring me to the far shore of morning.

Thank you,

To my therapist,

When I can't sleep
I make line breaks,
Lights off, laptop
open across my legs,
shining as a ghost, an electric aberration.

I return and shift through letters to people I don't know.

This is how I calm down.

And then when I finally sleep, I dance,
my legs kicking and jumping to
some beat in the back of my head, like
a neighbors stereo pushing through the apartment wall on
Sunday morning,

I wake sweaty,
tangled in sheets like the snared fox on my uncle's farm, flies at it's eyes, sun on its
red coat.

I reach for my phone, or
computer, but
never the glass of water I place next to my bed every night.

Never the water.

What does all this mean?

I await your answer,

To the Nigerian Lawyer I met at the bar,

I was half drunk on throw-back cocktails and shots of rye.

You turned to me at the bar and pointed to my glass of watery whiskey. You asked what I was drinking and I thought maybe you had me confused with someone else. You didn't.

You told me your name, where you are from. I nodded and noticed your height, taller than me.

You told me about a trip back to Africa and not fitting in there, and your mother and father the Dr.'s who live in Nashville. You told me about passing the bar, and starting work in two weeks so right now you are just partying. I noticed your white lace top, more like a doily, less like sexy.

You were talking to me, you said, because you were bored with your friend's birthday party, the real reason you were there. You thought I looked interesting and different from the kids at Cornell Law. The bar felt crowded with people like me, shoulder to shoulder, elbowing each others ribs to get a drink. It felt like a line.

You weren't going home with me, just to be clear, and isn't it annoying that I would even have to say that, you said.

I said, no worries I wasn't going to invite you home with me anyway, smiled at my own polite lie, and ordered a round of whiskey on the rocks.

You told me about your brother who drowned in lake when you were a child. It was a camping trip, the last one your family took. He is forever older in your mind, a boy of 8 still towering over you, all arms and legs. It was quiet between us as we both saw your bother stuck at an impossible age.

I ordered more whiskey on ice, yours with a little water. We paid separate, and clinked glasses, to brother's, I said.

Right then something came down behind your eyes. It was a quick but slow all at once, like time-lapse photography of the birth and death of flower.

Thank you, you said.

I excused myself to use the bathroom, and when I returned you were gone.

I didn't say it then, never thought to through the whiskey and rye, I'm sorry about your brother.

Xo