

The Person I Was Yesterday

I share a house with the person I was yesterday. She is exactly like me, minus 24 hours.

When I first moved into this apartment I was nervous about living alone. Three years with Ryan made me used to another human's sounds – the rustle of his sock feet on the floor, his yawns. The first night was tough. But it turned out okay because the next day I started sharing this place with the person I was yesterday.

She showed up with two bags in her hands, wearing the outfit I had on the day before. I asked why she looked so scared and she said she didn't know what was going to happen. She wasn't even sure she ever got over her fear of the dark. I told her it's not as bad as you think.

I gave her the living room fold-out couch to sleep on but at some point in the night I heard her drag the three heavy couch cushions into my room and drop them on the floor in a line. She stretched a sheet over the cushions and lay down and then proceeded to make such a noise, crying and blowing her nose on my pillowcase.

The next morning when I sat up she was already awake, eyes fixed on the ceiling, unmoving, like a corpse. I left to go make coffee. The pot was weak. No matter what I do, the pot is always weak.

When she came into the kitchen she was wearing my clothes from yesterday. She had picked them out of the hamper. I wondered if she also had on my old underwear. But I didn't feel like asking.

We sat together with cups of coffee. We were quiet.

At first I liked the company. We had the same taste in TV and books and we shared a lot of opinions, though mine – having had an extra day to mature – were more defined. This gave me an advantage over her I think I misused. One day she came to me after realizing I had been right about something the day before, not to apologize but to be angry.

There was no need to make me feel stupid, she said.

I said I was just trying to help.

I found a job in a coffee shop, and then she got a job in the same coffee shop. We were short staffed, so even though I'd only been there a day I was asked to train her. She was slow. I was slow too, but she was even slower. She got lost in steaming a pitcher of milk, carefully, like it was the last thing on earth she'd ever have to do. Customer's faces on the other side of the espresso machine turned sour with impatience. I elbowed in to help. She squealed and dropped the milk. She went to get a mop while I made the long line of coffees. No one had taught her how to wring out the mop head properly and instead of soaking up the milk she made an even bigger puddle of water. I slipped and spilled the milk again.

She infuriated me sometimes. She'd make a wrong order that I'd gotten wrong the day before. She'd crack jokes no one laughed at, no one ever had. And sometimes she'd just sit there, watching life around her like someone at the movies. I would beg her to say something, anything.

I know, she said. I know.

But she never took my damn advice.

If I left the door open and a moth got in, she'd leave the door open and a moth would get in. If I tripped on the sidewalk and teenagers laughed at me, she'd trip on the sidewalk and teenagers would laugh at her.

After weeks of just sitting at home with her, I had to get out. I went with some friends to a club. I got drunk. I kissed two different men. I went home without learning their names. The best part about the kisses was right before it happened, not during. During, I was already thinking about how she'd be doing the same thing tomorrow and there was no way I could stop her.

The next evening I sat around, glum, while she tried on dresses from my closet.

Remember who you are, I said.

I already know who I am, she said.

And when she stumbled home at 4am and started sobbing at the kitchen table, it was me who stayed awake with her until dawn, listening.

I thought about leaving. I tried to, once. Went to stay at my sister's for the weekend. We had a fun night of drinking homemade cocktails, watching stand-up comedy specials in our slippers, and drunk-

dialing her new boyfriend. The next afternoon we went for a walk in the park, talking about old crushes and birth control and marriage. We stopped at the store for a box of instant lemonade mix to drink in the sun on her front lawn. And when we got back, there she was, looking lost on the front porch.

What could we do? We let her in. We made her lemonade too. And she sat there and complained about all the topics I covered yesterday.

My sister kept looking at me. She didn't know what to say. She'd comforted me already, nodded her head as I listed all my problems. And here they were again.

When she was done, cried herself dry, she wanted to get drunk. She wanted homemade cocktails. But we'd already done that the night before.

We're just gonna eat spaghetti and read books, we told her.

She looked at us. Betrayal. She went into the guest room and didn't come out except to pee. I had to sleep on the air mattress, which somewhere around 3 o'clock meant I had to sleep on the hard floor.

I drove us back to our apartment. She cried the whole way, brushing tears away as if scratching an itch. Such a fragile thing, like blown glass. I kept my own face resolutely dry.

That night I sat down and told her I was moving away. I would go make coffee somewhere else, the next state over perhaps. She wanted to come.

No, I said.

Why not? she asked.

I didn't have a good answer. So I said nothing.

I packed up all my things, which were her things too. I left the sweaters I didn't like anymore, the jeans that didn't fit. She wore them, oblivious to how much she would soon hate them. I took all the kitchen things, the knives and pans and cutting boards. She tried to make the best of it.

I can microwave food, she said. Don't worry about me.

She stood outside on the lawn while I drove away. I put on an old CD I used to like, but I shut it off when I realized it reminded me of her. I kept turning around to check she hadn't climbed in the back seat when I wasn't looking. All I saw was garbage bags of clothes.

The new place was smaller, the city the same. I sat and watched TV with only the movement of the vertical blinds to keep me company, like somebody was parting the slits with a finger to see what was going on outside. I had a job interview in the morning, went there, talked about coffee. When I came back she was waiting for me.

It was the same routine as before. Spilling milk, kissing strangers, crying.

I tried to make rules this time. I designated her a shelf in the fridge so we could keep our rotting vegetables apart. I learned to change my schedule every day because she would repeat the pattern 24 hours later and I wanted our paths to cross as little as possible. I made friends. I'd go to a once-a-week knitting circle or book club knowing they were safe from her because she'd show up the next day when they were long gone. It made me a little sad to picture her sitting there with her herbal tea, alone, so I tried not to think of it too much.

It happened that I met someone, someone in the book club. He looked at me with a warmth I never saw in Ryan's eyes. In the heat of his gaze I felt my heart bloom, like a rose.

His name was Shane. I brought him to the apartment to share a bottle of wine and look at the new bird feeder I'd hung outside the kitchen window. No birds had found it yet so there wasn't much to see besides it just being there, waiting for hungry beaks. But I wanted to show somebody, somebody besides the person I was yesterday.

We stood there in silence and sipped wine as we watched the feeder twist softly in the wind. It was a warm silence, something you'd like to crawl into, like a bed.

We sat at the kitchen table and shared a bag of pretzels. We talked a little, about things like favorite books and hairstyles we used to have. But any small noise outside the room would send me into silence, and not the kind of silence that was warm.

When the wind blew I thought it was her, outside, breathing on the window. When a car rushed down the street I thought it was her coming home. I tried to remember where I had been 24 hours ago. Was I grocery shopping? Alone in some bar? Or was I on the front porch sliding my key in the front door lock?

What are you thinking about? Shane kept asking. He tilted his wine glass to his lips and waited for my response.

I heard a sound like the front door opening, like her taking off her shoes and unzipping her jacket.

Or maybe it was just the neighbors outside.