

THE RIDE

Dear Husband,

Your side stays cold, and neat (it's been years), even as you dance at the edge of my dreams, a whisper, a distant star deep in the universe, falling, an arc of secret light. I know exterior events stamp change, the veneered design alters, but the sweetmeat hasn't slipped away, your whisper still sings in my ear.

It chafes to be in my company. I saw it last time we met in that gallery.

Remember—I invited you to see the 'never been out of a private collection' Jackson Pollock—and when your eyes first found my face a spasm of anger flashed across your features, and I wondered if she'd been mean to you that morning over coffee and white cheese or if you even had breakfast together (the bitch).

I couldn't have been more isolated, guts churning, as I waited for you, my mate, despite this concrete world where months keep the day to day apart, you, dream boy, dropping your pants on that craggy cliff overlooking the Gualala bay.

Hugs and kisses, Moi.

Lucy hits send then packs up her book-bag: keys, phone, i-pad. She needs to have her head securely attached today. Any more nonsense would actually give Scott reason to boot her out. He said it yesterday: I've had it with you, Lucy.

Scott, architecture man, runs the firm where Lucy builds models now of projects so that the money can see what they are paying for. No one in the city is as good with an Exacto knife and a piece of balsa wood as Lucy is—Scott's threats may be empty—but Lucy knows she's been pushing it lately. Her my hearts' "is broken," does not get through pragmatic Scott. He wants, no matter the state of anyone's union, for his employees to perform as promised.

On the bus, (Lucy believes in mass transit) Lucy sits in the back, where it is quiet, across from a man with boy/man tattoos dripping out of his tee-shirt sleeves, and up between his toes (he's wearing flip flops) and one on his neck even, just below the hem of his knit cap which looks way too hot for this summer-in-Los-Angeles day. Lucy's melting already.

Tattoo man, a decorated hand resting on either thigh, simply sits, his body swaying in concert with the bus, and Lucy puts together the large font letters, one stenciled onto each of his eight fingers, "READ MORE," a fact Lucy will include later when explaining her tardy arrival to Scott. She will add a note about the BOOKMAN OLD STYLE font, hoping to subvert Scott's anger with pesky detail.

Lucy deciphers the image on Tattoo man's thick neck—an image of a sewing machine creeping out of his tee shirt, the bobbin case and needle, the thread guide and tension regulator dancing along his Adam's apple, the bobbin winder and balance wheel resting, Lucy assumes, along his cervical spine.

Lucy worked for husband/architect for years, 1/100 scale models of modernist buildings, beautiful miniatures, balconies like filigree, stairs for fleas and kitchens for tiny Barbie and tiny Ken. Her favorite was the track housing development—homes informed by mid-century ideals overlaid with pre-9/11 optimism, tree-lined streets peopled by Jesse Jackson's rainbow coalition. These families live in harmony! Lucy had included every combo she could imagine cohabitating under one roof. Her favorite figures from the catalogue were the "Traditional dress Arab Arabic Model People," and she teamed up the male in the set in his white dishdasha (thawb) with an Italian nun in a full-on black habit. The mom-nun stood at the kitchen sink looking out to where child one, two and three played basketball in the driveway: a Native American girl-child (long

black braids), a white boy (cargo pants and tee shirt), and a Japanese girl (kimono and elaborate geisha-like hair-do).

Husband/architect, after his initial “You’ve got to be kidding?” had wrapped his arm around her and smiled. Then, before the client presentation, jets flew into towers and husband/architect asked that the “kitchy”—that was his word—world view be modified and Lucy/model builder obliged. For fifteen years model-world turned all white again.

Lucy forces herself into the present moment (Don’t dwell on the past, her therapist says). Now, in 2022, Scott would let a nomadic Mongolian goat herder wander the tiny streets of West Hollywood.

Lucy eyes Tattoo man’s bouncing belly and wonders what lurks beneath the grubby tee shirt. Lucy looks up into his face as he clears his throat, and finds his eyes on her and he says, “You can’t **not** be a teacher.”

His voice, high pitched and soft, belies his rough exterior. Lucy wonders what prompts him to this assumption: her kind expression, or does he sniff judgment, some disdain (parental and condemning).

The blooming Jacarandas lining Wilshire Boulevard catch Lucy’s eye like they have every day this week and the sheer pleasure of it makes her wonder if this abandon to a single sensory experience might signify some renewed lease on the future. She digs her phone out of her bag: “Dear Husband,” begins the text, “the color blue pushes in and you come with it—close and inside of me and the tattoo man will one day be sitting where I am, but not be as alone.”

Lucy hits send.

“I build models of buildings for architects,” Lucy says to Tattoo man. She knows husband/architect is not going to throw down his number two pencil and suddenly appear at her side.

Tattoo man says, mysteriously, “I see the glistening world too.”

“Can you taste the people you love?”

Tattoo man nods. “And songs hide in their voices.”

Lucy gets up from her bus-seat and crosses the aisle and sits close to Tattoo man, her jeaned leg against his jeaned leg. She can smell Irish Spring soap and knows he is fresh from the shower.

Lucy looks into his eyes: “Do women have to worry about man-eating sharks?”

“I will say, in this context, that you should,” says Tattoo man.

Lucy reaches for his hand; she rests his hand on her knee and opens his fingers and traces the letters, lightly and says, without looking at him, “I like sharks.”