

## Peppermint

As the ice cracks and snaps beneath me, my first thought is that I should have known better. That I should have seen the signs: the ice was just too thin, the water, a little too warm. But I had been excited, planning this day since I learned you had never been ice skating. I watched the weather reports and showed you tutorials on my phone. I bought you the best skates I could find as well as new gloves, since you claimed yours weren't warm enough. I spent days finding the perfect spot, isolated, as far away from civilization as we could get. No crowded ice rinks for us; I wanted us to be alone.

“Isn't that dangerous?” you had asked.

“Trust me,” I replied, “It'll be fine.” You had been right of course. You were always right. And late. Always late. If you had been on time, 7:30, after work like we had planned, we could be laughing about this right now. You could be wrapping a blanket around my shoulders and scolding me for my recklessness. I could be telling you I'm sorry with soft kisses as you pretend to be more angry than scared. But you just had to stop for hot chocolate on the way. Peppermint from Manello's. You promised you'd get me extra marshmallows and whipped cream as an apology.

I texted back with a single kissing emoji, threw my phone in my car, and waited. I know you won't believe it, but I really did wait. I sat in the snow until my fingers grew stiff and I couldn't feel my backside anymore. Until the stars weren't enough to hold my interest. My watch read 8:30 when I finally got out on the ice. And now, as the water paralyzes me, hitting my body like a shockwave, a part of me can't help but be angry with you.

I picture every time you've left me hanging – the play in New York, our reservations at Viola's, your own birthday party. Your excuses never made sense; it doesn't take an hour to fill your car up with gas or to pick up a pack of gum from the convenience store. It certainly doesn't take that long to get hot chocolate. I know this isn't your fault. Really. It's mine, as it often is. But as I sink, already frozen to the bone, all I can do is watch the water grow darker and darker still and think of how this all went wrong, about how late you're going to be today. And how you'll finally make it out here, Styrofoam cups in hand, and find nothing but my car on the road and a hole in the ice. They probably won't get my body until the morning. I hope you're not there when they do. White turns to blue and blue fades to an endless, empty black and I gasp, the icy water filling my lungs like a shotgun round to the chest.

Images of my first swim lesson echo in my mind as I try to pump and kick and paddle my way to the top. As I flail, I can hear the instructor telling my mom, "I'm not sure she's ready." I claw at the water as if it were ground, as if I can use it to pull myself up. I'm not sure if I'm actually moving or imagining it, but I keep trying. Still, I sink. A vision of you appears before me, disappointment in your eyes like the day at the cliffs, when you called me an idiot, your mascara running.

"You're going to get yourself killed!" you had said, moments after I had dived off the rocks and into the water below. You were so certain that I had broken something. You checked twice just to be sure. Afterwards, you threatened to break my legs yourself if I scared you like that again. I promised I wouldn't. I didn't mean for it to be a lie.

A pressure builds beneath my ribs, where it swells upwards to my throat, constricting. Splotches of black and explosions of flashing colors blot out the water. In the distance, far beyond me now, I swear I can hear you yelling my name. "Megan, I have the cocoa." And for a

moment, I can taste it on my lips. I can see you, smiling, your cheeks already red from the cold, snowflakes in your hair. I reach out for your hand and hold it tight, the words I always meant to say, but never did, leaking from my lips. A bubble rises to the pond's surface and bursts.