

The Day You Left Me

The day you left me I was understandably distraught. I thought to throw all your worldly possessions out the window. I'd seen it done before in so many movies, shows, and newsreel tragedies. I needed some kind of familiarity, like the gentle slope and bend of your back—contour and line, shadow and light in drowsy pre-dawn discolor. But I managed only your nightgown, which drifted like an unspent tissue onto the hood of Betty, our Honda.

Whatever clothes remained were no good at this point, hadn't been for some while—the best day of a shirt or a pair of socks or a dress is it's first, it's debutante, virgin to the shape and touch of the body and the soapy tumble of the washing machine, fresh to the aspect of the mirror and the reflection in the bus window. I let them alone in the drawers of the dresser like sardines in a can, the kind you didn't like, would never try, not even on toast swimming in vinegar. Too salty oily soily, you'd portmanteaued.

This brought me into the kitchen. I would have taken the phone off the hook if people still paid for such devices, still went through such furious routines. Instead I let my cell die and stay that way.

I ate the freezer empty. I polished off the ice cream first. It was Neapolitan, for didn't we just despise choice. Then the frozen gyoza. I drank three cups of lukewarm peas. That got me feeling sick. So I put a stiff chicken breast on the back of my neck and another on my gut between my belly and my crotch. Then I chomped through the last of the ice cubes

I went into the living room and started the record player without checking what was on it.

Van Morrison's voice creaked to life there with me in the room, company at last. He was meant to be an ass. Suzie from work had told you that when she went to his show he came out for half an hour, halfheartedly she called it, and then he up and left. Swore at some booing fans before going.

But it had your favorite song on it, "Moondance," and you always played it when you wanted me to slow dance with you. You couldn't believe that Van the Man was a jerk and that I was too lily-livered, too two left-footed to dance with you even alone in our living room. Now I wanted to frisbee the record against the wall. I let it play out to the scratchy end.

I curled up on the sofa and cried until the pillow I'd been hugging was slimy and light invaded the blind slits like killers for hire. Outside the sun was surely yellow as a yolk.

As I stood up to fiddle with the blinds, the mantle addressed me. It wasn't so much the mantle or the fire below it that wasn't lit but the piano beside it that neither of us could play.

I thought I heard it sigh, a tired wire snapping, the soul of an elephant still crying in the ivory keys. It had been your grandmother's, a Steinway, priceless, your grand inheritance, but you couldn't take that where you were going.

The piano was covered in photos. There was one of you as a girl, smiley mouth full of baby-gapped teeth. Hugging the rope haired neck of rocking horse. You had on a cotton dress with flowers on it.

One of me young and clean cut, some graduation by the way I sat for the photo, before I'd met you, a life before. It seemed restarting. Me and me in time again.

One of us at the park in the grass, perfect afternoon faces pinned in place by the camera shutter—whose?—you wielding a piece of cheese with all the elegant ease of a duchess or a farmer's daughter and me starting a laugh or finishing one—better starting—moved by the laughter, unstilled by what you surely said or did or were that day.

One of you in a bikini in Hawaii. Our honeymoon. The background was beachy, standard loveliness, palms and sand and hues of blue. But your body was so your own, hard and tight, your breasts pressed up by their natural buoyancy.

Blood unwillingly engorged my cock.

Not knowing what else to do I masturbated. Twice. I got nothing out of it except a dribble of spunk and some minutes of spindly distraction.

I charged my phone and was hit right away with a slew of notifications, messages and missed calls. Word had gotten. I sent out updates as required—these were the haps, the going-ons, and these here the meager plans. I'm okay. I'm okay. I had it copied, saved, stored deep inside like DNA, and I pasted reassurance again and again.

But like you used to tell me, big smile on your face, it's not gonna be okay. I imagined bootstraps and what picking oneself up by them would be like. I thought, well if it's not gonna be okay, *I* still can be.

Around dusk I timidly sieged the desk. Your drawer was filled with scraps unbooked and papers loosed—tickets stubs from rock concerts; business cards from barbecue joints; bus passes from faraway cities; napkin doodles from the café, the bar, the street corner bench; leaflets folded into boats or hats depending; welcome maps from nature parks, *leave no trace* they insisted; ruled pages laid with intention and account—the potential for bookmarking wondrous, life’s throwaway, meaning-stricken paraphernalia.

Postcards that would not be sent. No forwarding address testified. I didn’t know where you were going, had gone. I was too blanked to guess. Maybe it was like how you used to get out of jury duty. You’d say you’d be leaving the country.

But you’d left more than that. Left more than me. You were dead.