

Sober Lamentation

*Fuck, fuck, fuck, fuck, fuck...*

*What did I just do?*

#

8:35 am

My alarm clock lets out a soft tune and I reach over to whack it off. Marie stirs next to me but doesn't wake up. I get out of bed without a second thought.

9:20 am

The coffee maker bubbles and hisses, and after a few moments I pour the contents of the pot into my ceramic. I sit at the kitchen table and flip open my laptop.

Email empty. I check my phone.

No texts. No missed calls.

I take a sip of my coffee. The picture of Marie and I on the fridge stares back at me. Our happy smiles taunt me.

I grimace and take the mocking.

10:03 am

I slip on my shoes and step out the door. The door hits the frame harder than intended and I imagine Marie stirring in her slumber. I slide into my car seat and start the engine. On my wheel, I feel the two notches I've made, one for every year we've dated. I gaze into our window briefly and close the door, pressing the car off the pavement.

5:00 pm

My shitty work shift ends and I gather my things. I check my phone; two messages. My friend texts me about going to the bar. Marie has woken up and berates me about something I don't have time to read. I head home to change.

6:00 pm

We're fighting again. I walk out of the room and nearly trip on her shrill words.

I don't remember when our days turned this consistently sour. At first rare, the arguments now swarm our tiny one-bedroom up to five times a week.

My mind floats to days of chaste kisses on my cheek and warm, nervous palms on my chest as she reminds me that I forgot to start the *fucking* dishwasher when I left.

*Where the fuck are my shoes?*

I scan the floor in front of our room but can't think straight. I can't even remember what started the argument today. I couldn't care less at this point.

I spot them in the room over and pick them up with my fingers. Her ignored shouts follow me out the window as I slam the door behind me.

I put my shoes on in the car and drive off.

6:45 pm

I pick up some tallboys and shooters at the liquor store before heading to AJ's apartment.

I weave around the pile of shoes at AJ's entrance and set the brown bag on the off-kilter coffee table. The apartment is quiet, and as I walk in further, I realize AJ is asleep. Sidestepping the piles of clothes in his room, I nudge him awake.

“Fuck, I forgot. Gimme a while.”

I grab a beer from the bag and settle onto the corduroy couch. The TV flickers on and a wedding ring commercial plays. A happy couple looks into each other's eyes and a sparkling stone fills the screen. My head drops back and I press the off button.

9:00 pm

Shoved to the opposite side of the couch, my phone's screen lights up every few minutes, tiny message notifications filling the home screen.

“Should I get that for you?” AJ motions his head towards the phone and I shake mine, reaching my hand out for the bong. He eyes me and nods knowingly.

Thick grey clouds circle and float throughout the room. I inhale and feel the smoke burn the back of my throat. Closing my eyes shut, I hold it down until I can no longer, and when I exhale, nothing comes out.

I open my third Cuervo shooter and down it.

10:00 pm

The poor Lyft driver turns his head and recoils as we enter his car, nose scrunching. Two blocks into the drive, he lowers his window. I lower my head. My phone sits in my lap. I look away.

10:45 pm

By the time we get to the bar, the music can be heard softly, bass bumping behind the brick walls. We take two laps around the block, waiting for some more people to arrive. I drink another shooter on the second lap, letting it get warm in my clammy palm before dropping it into a trash can a few feet from the door.

11:00 pm

The bouncer checks our IDs at the door. He gives me a discerning once over and lets me in. I feel his gaze sting the back of my head as I walk through the door before turning around to the next patron, the rubbing alcohol scent of our frequented hole-in-the-wall singing my nose hairs.

11:45 pm

The bar is officially packed, and the four downed shooters have made the edges of my vision fuzz up. Sweat beads lightly at the nape of my neck, and I motion to the bartender.

As I wait on my drink, I survey the crowd. Small throngs thrash about, rhythmless, on the open floor. The bartender slides me my drink and I slide him a bill. My eyes swipe through the bodies. AJ dances closely with a pretty blonde 20-something, grinding rhythmically on her waist. I flick my sight to the girl next to them, sidestepping alone back and forth to the sound. I take a sip and let the liquid coat my throat as I realize she and blondie are friends. I chug the rest of the cup and make my way over to introduce myself.

12:30 pm

The girl and I stand at the bar again, holding ourselves up on the counter. We order our second round of shots and I shake the salt onto her lime-coated hand. She chokes as the tequila rushes down her body and I laugh, following the liquid's trail in my mind. She hits me playfully. My phone burns in my pocket. I smile back guiltily.

1:00 am

We're on the dance floor again, I think. My mind flickers to Marie for a moment. The photo on the fridge taunts me. I stumble and order another shot. My eyes fall shut like a tilted doll's, and the alcohol seeps into my being. The girl's delicate hand touches my shoulder. I let her pull me to the floor again, like a dog on a leash.

2:00 am

AJ's ordered a Lyft, and the three of us stand on the curb, leaning against the building. Blondie's yacking around the corner, and I can hear her retches even above the sound of my conscience.

I've given the girl my jacket, and when I open my eyes, I see that she has pulled the collar to her

nose, taking in my scent. She catches my eye and smiles sheepishly. My stomach flips. The Lyft pulls up as blondie turns the corner, wiping her mouth with the back of her hand.

3:00 am

AJ and blondie have gone to his room, and the muffled creaking of the mattress makes for decent background music.

The girl stands, arms crossed onto the windowsill, blowing smoke out into the night. A cigarette hangs limply from her fingers. Ash gathers at the end of the stick, and right when it threatens to fall, she flicks it with a nail, polish worn and chipped.

I sit on the couch in the dark and watch her silhouette on the floor. I watch as it puts out the boge and follow it as it slides towards me. I watch it as it gets closer and finally melds to mine. I watch as her shadow lifts its cold hand to my face. Her perfumed scent fills my lungs. I inhale like I'm dying and hold it until I can't anymore. She moves my face to hers and I can feel her eyes on me, but mine don't dare to reciprocate. I lay on the couch like dead meat, anticipation mixing with the alcohol sitting stagnant in my gut.

I don't remember her laying her lips on mine, nor do I remember my chilled fingertips on her stomach, her back, her breasts. I don't remember her warmth, or the way that her tongue tasted like cigarettes and love itself. I don't remember the kisses I left on her neck, or the way that she moaned into my ear - hot, humid, and breathy. I don't remember how I ended up on top of her, her body squirming under mine.

But I do remember when I finally met her gaze. I remember that she looked at me and her eyes knew. The eyes of a guilty man are glossy and helpless, and she saw me. She peered into my ugly core and twisted and played with its deformed strings.

3:37 am

I'm stumbling on the street looking for my car. My hands are pulling at my hair and I feel an anxiety attack coming on.

*Fuck, fuck, fuck, fuck, fuck...*

*What did I just do?*

I pat down my pockets in search of my keys and snap my head back, realizing I've dropped them about twenty paces back in my drunken panic. The girl calls for me from the open window. I jog back, nearly tripping twice, and swipe my keys from the ground, spotting my car half a block in the opposite direction. Speed walking over, I slide into the driver's seat and rest my face in my hands.

*Fuck, fuck, fuck, fuck, fuck, FUCK...*

I slam my fists into the leather dashboard and scream. The reflection of my eyes in the rearview mirror prompts a rage in me and I slap it away with such force that I nearly rip it off its axis. The keys fumble into the slot, and I shake my body aimlessly as if to attempt to shake the copious amounts of liquor out of myself.

I drive home in hot, silent shame.

4:15 am

I sit in the car and look up to the second floor of our townhouse, an eerie darkness seeming to cascade out from our windows onto the sidewalk. A slight foggiess mars the street.

*How didn't I crash?*

I briefly survey my body to make sure I'm still alive. My chest heaves in shaky, broken movements, while dread and anxiety couple to make a home in my stomach. My fingernails pick at the chipped leather of the driving wheel. I am unfortunately very alive. I sneak another glance up, take a breath, and push open the car door.

4:25 am

I've managed to stumble up the stairs. Somehow, my nerves make it harder to walk than the shots ruminating deep in my system. I slip off my shoes, tip-toeing haphazardly towards our room.

I don't want to see her.

My stomach sinks further into myself than I thought was possible. I consider sleeping on the couch. It feels evil to get into bed with her. I feel wrong. I know I'm wrong. I know I've sinned. I look up at the ceiling and petition any god to pity me enough to strike me down now.

I wait for a moment.

No response. I nod in understanding.



Nearing our bedroom door, I begin to shake viciously; as my hand reaches out to certain death, I attempt to strengthen myself. The pads of my fingers manage to grip and turn the doorknob stealthily enough.

I peer inside and see her.

The lights are off. I enter the room and click the lock into the frame behind me cautiously. I move to the side of the bed and stand, looming over her sleeping figure.

I don't know what I expected. A fight, I guess. Her anger, or her tears, or an interrogation.

Instead, her mouth lays open, drooling a puddle onto the pillow. The sheets are pulled halfway up her body, and underneath she wears my clothes. My heart seizes. Her phone lies loosely in her palm, and mine seems to send an invisible penitentiary shock through my right leg at the sight.

I screw my eyes shut and stave off another attack.

I get into bed fully clothed, turning my back to her. I close my eyes and try to drown the thoughts that attack me. Guilt consumes me like a starving vulture.

I feel her soft hand on my shoulder.

“Baby?”

Her voice is tired and a bit hoarse. She turns me over, eyes scrunched and sleepy.

“I'm sorry,” she whispers, fingers twirling with the collar of my shirt. “I shouldn't have yelled at you earlier. I'm sorry.”

I feel like I'm going to puke. This is so much worse than I'd thought it would be. I struggle to hold back the tears that have been threatening to spill since I'd gotten in the car.

She presses her lips against mine. Tears coat her lips like a salty lip gloss.

I wonder if she can taste the regret on mine.

She settles onto my chest, wrapping her arms around me. After five minutes, I can feel her chest rising and falling. Her hair tickles my neck.

Now, seeing her like this, it's too much.

Hot, remorseful tears coat my face, and silent sobs wrack my body. I try my hardest to not let her hear me.

*I'm so sorry.*