

Let Me Say This

New message from trhnlwrdn!

You remind me of a line from a book by Jonathan Franzen, which I haven't read, because Jesus Christ who has time for that pussy bullshit

Everybody in the world falls in love with me when they first meet me. I am impossibly beautiful, eminently approachable.

One time, my ex was parking his car, we were getting groceries, and a yellowjacket flew in through the open window and down the back of his shirt. His hands snatched at his collar, yelping girlishly. Without a foot on the brake, the car was easing into a parked bumper. I screamed at him from the passenger seat, the brake *the brake*.

We hit, there was no real damage, and he looked around and didn't even leave a number. He said you could've pulled the e brake you know. I don't blame you but you know, you could have.

trhnlwrdn has one picture, and I cannot see past his shoulders, his jaw turned half-away from the camera. There is a dark coil of hair that hangs over his forehead, and he is wearing a sweater he probably got from a thrift store. His smile is captured in a volley of laughter. I read his profile like a cheap horoscope over and over: he writes *I am interested in things that involve focus, research, introspection, and vigor*.

He is a Capricorn, the goat. His asshole is probably perma clenched. I am bored by his profile, but his message is funny, and surprising, which is funny in its own right.

New message from trhnlwrdn!

We should get a couple drinks and talk about other ways you're smarter than me

I am a dragon, gargantuan, larger than buildings, larger than mountains. I am covered in glittering scales, unbreachable, so many facets catching the light. I will engulf everything in sulfur. Scorpios are sex and death. I love men, they call me irresistible, I pick their bones from my teeth.

I was with my ex for four years. I don't like to talk about it, but when I do, this is the way I talk about it: "I don't want to accuse anyone, it wasn't like *rape* or anything, but there were a lot of times when I didn't want to have sex and we had sex." When I tell this to men, they say oh yeah I get that, meaning that when she's your girlfriend you can ask this of her.

But my ex wasn't a monster you see when things got too bad, he did this thing that he called using me, as in *can I use you?* where he would cover me in lotion and fuck whatever part of my body no penetration necessary.

On my first date with trhnlwrdn, who even has a real name – Andrew – I spend three hours getting ready. I shower, shave, anoint myself with oils until I radiate heat until my skin is velvet. I wear my good underwear under my dress. I am wholesome and clean, lustrous as a piece of blown glass.

I know how to walk in heels I know how to move in a skirt I know how to stand for appraisal. She can even chew gum and talk too!

What I am trying to say is that I am good at fucking on the first date.

When I am on the subway, he texts *I am wearing a brown jacket* so I can find him, as if I didn't memorize his picture.

I text back *I am the blonde girl in all black, probably looking confused*

I am so relatable!

I have a secret when walking on a crowded sidewalk: cast your aura out around you and people will not touch you. Walk deliberately, gait slow but effortless, chin up, look up, feel your aura around you like armor. People part like the Red Sea.

Andrew has feline-type eyes, glacier blue. When he speaks he looks somewhere up and to the right. He says, “Can I get you a drink?” and looks at a sign on the wall that says *We do not serve women You must bring your own.*

I order an Old Fashioned and hold the glass in a practiced languid way. The glass licks cold and wetly against my fingertips. I do not dig the orange slice out of the glass to chew on. I say, “So, what do you do?”

He sips at his beer, frowning. “I’m a piano technician.” He says, “Tuning, repairs, restoration. You’d be surprised how many pianos need work around here.”

I laugh, I say, “Are you actually ninety years old?”

“What?”

“That just, seems like a job for an old man” but it makes sense, Capricorns are builders, and I imagine him an open heart surgeon, testing an intensive network of strings and hammers.

He is confused. Am I laughing at him or flirting with him. I smile and say, “How’d you get into that line of work, family business?”

“School, actually. I went to BU for music performance.”

“Okay, wow,” I say, “What’s your favorite thing to play?”

“Rachmaninoff’s concertos.”

The Russian. Later when I am feeling particularly ambitious, I listen to Rachmaninoff’s piano concertos one after the other. I lie on the couch tracing the fabric

and the music is as brutally filling as a dozen boiled potatoes. I imagine Andrew playing heavy ivory keys very quickly. It's very hard for me to look at a man's fingers without thinking about them inside me.

He says, "What about you, what do you do?"

"I work at a bank" I say "as a teller."

"Ever gotten robbed?"

He says this like a joke but I love to watch their faces turn as I tell them yes, yes he had a gun, yes it was me, no they never caught him. He was wearing a ski mask and gloves and my first thought was not that he was robbing us but that he must be really cold. When the bank brought in the therapist afterwards, he told me I was perfectly well adjusted, I didn't require any further counseling. But when I went home I imagined again and again ripping the ski mask off and scratching his eyes out with talons.

I am not dishonest, but I do know how to say the right things. I tell Andrew, "Yeah, once. It was pretty standard. All in all, it lasted less than thirty seconds."

"It didn't make you want to stop working at a bank?"

"No, not really." I say, "It's kind of like when somebody jumps in front of the train you're trying to get on – it's horrible, and sad, but mostly inconvenient. We had to shut down the branch. The police came, and I had to tell them the same story for an hour. 'What color were his gloves?' 'Was he black? Did he sound black?' That kind of thing."

I thought I had told the detectives the truth, but the security camera disproved everything – his sweatpants were red, not his sweatshirt, which was blue, his hood was pulled up so you couldn't see his hair.

My ex is a Leo, which is one of the reasons we never worked, everybody knows a fire and a water sign together is a bad match. Leos are ruled by the sun, blazing terrible light, all bravado.

Back then I was so small nobody had to make space for me. I was so small I fit in hands. Old men would make their deposits and ask me to smile and I would snap my teeth grinning. My ex told me I don't like you working there, I'm worried about you all the time.

When he found out I was faking my orgasms he gripped my wrist *hard* and said don't ever do that again I swear to god.

Andrew drives me home and the passenger door handle doesn't work from the inside which is only funny because I'm pretty sure he's not trying to kidnap me. I tell him to come inside.

He drops his heavy brown coat and unbuckles his jeans and is standing there in his white t shirt like a young Marlon Brando and pushes me onto the bed. He is a good kisser, which means he is doing all of the work, and his body is heavy and well-muscled. He grips me and my hipbones fit perfectly into his palms.

I want him inside me I want to consume him

It should be good because Scorpios and Capricorns resonate to the same sexual frequency, but his focus is too absolute, too aggressive. Later he tells me "I get turned on my pleasuring my partner" which is why he watches my face so intently, but I'm trapped inside my brain performing every arch and moan saying to myself It's just the first time it's never good the first time.

He doesn't use a condom so I have to sacrifice a shirt as a cum rag and clean up in the bathroom. I stare at myself in the mirror after scraped clean and throbbing sore. My eyeliner is smeared into fat bruises. If I wasn't myself but somebody else, would I think I was pretty?

He spends the night. His body is built like a lumberjack's, his chest pelted with hair up to his shoulders, and fills more than half the bed. In three weeks from now, he will say that he loves me as I fuck him on top, and I'll kiss him and press my face into a pillow but not say anything, hating *hating* how much I want to say it back.

I don't have a fatal flaw but if I did it would be that I am too eager to please. Is that so terrible, wanting people to be happy?

My ex is not the only man I've dated who's had a rape fantasy. But if we're talking about fantasies, why even keep it bound by dimensions of this reality?

My fantasy is that I am an entity of pure energy, a field of vibrating strings, I am a supermassive black hole and you have passed over my event horizon oh baby it gets me so hot. Ask every woman who's put her keys between her fingers like claws and she'll tell you her fantasy is to not get raped.

Andrew and I start spending weekends holed up in my apartment, a strange kind of hibernation. There is a place around the corner called Kupel's that has fresh bagels on Sundays, still sticky steaming if you get there early enough. I like this place because they do bagels with lox the right way, salty and garlicky with pickled red onions and capers like a punch in the mouth.

One Sunday, we plan to get there right when it opens but end up walking in at a quarter to noon when the bagels are still fresh but not hot. My regular crowd is not there but we sit, drink coffee, eat bagels out of parchment paper.

I say, “Does anyone ever call you Andy? I’m big on nicknames.”

He chews, frowns. “My mom still does. I think I’m more of an Andrew.”

“Yeah, I could see that.”

He says, “If you called me Andy, I probably wouldn’t hate it.”

I say okay but know I never could never would, he just wasn’t the type.

We sit in not unfriendly silence like a normal couple. I knock his knee under the table with my own. We smile back and forth. I think: I’ve had this man’s dick in my mouth.

I wore his big t shirt to bed last night, woke up early without him knowing to brush my teeth and put on fresh mascara, because I look like heaven even when I wake up.

Someone’s left today’s newspaper on our table and I splay it out in awkward folds looking for the horoscopes. I say, “You want to know your future? Capricorn, right?”

“You believe in that kind of stuff?”

I say “Cynicism isn’t wisdom, Andrew” but playful playful. I say, ““Don’t fight change. Accept the inevitable and do your best to make it work for you one way or another. A romantic evening will improve your personal life. Three stars.”” I say, “That’s a good one.”

“Three stars doesn’t sound so good.”

“You could do worse.”

“‘Romantic evening,’ huh?”

“Yep.”

He says, “I should probably head back to my place after this, actually.”

I say sure thing I have to get ready for the week anyway. On the walk home he grabs me by a street corner and kisses me hard.

When walking on a crowded sidewalk: remember that every other person is living a life as vivid and complex as your own, and only see you as a random passerby, a cinematic extra. All you have to do to be anonymous is see yourself the way they do.

Whenever I watched tv with my ex, he would bite his fingernails and drop them behind the couch. I didn’t know about this habit until I was moving and pulled the couch away from the wall and found the carpet there furrowed with sharp half-moons, piles and piles of them.

Let’s all agree that everyone has their own problems.

At this point Andrew and I have been seeing each other for almost a month. One day he comes over, he takes off his pants without asking. I say what are you doing, he says what I like to be comfortable. The elastic of his boxer briefs is all stretched out. We are like an old married couple already.

That night we fuck on the kitchen floor. My spine bucks against the hardwood, he pounds me trapped against it, I have no where to go. I know where the red blotched bruises will be in the morning. He still hasn’t made me come.

He fucks me like a robot, expressionless, silent. My moans sound like professional grade soft core and I hate him and think, I’m doing my part. He tonelessly says “I’m going to come” before pulling out and coming on my stomach.

I clean up with toilet paper, I waste half a roll. I say “What the fuck was that?”

“What?”

“You were like a robot, did you not notice?”

He says, “Sorry, I was just focused on you.” He says, “I’m sorry” but he just sounds confused.

In the morning I make us breakfast and when I go to crack an egg Andrew stops me, is surprised and happy by how large the egg looks in my small hand, he can easily hold two. We look at our hands holding eggs side by side. He says I bet I can get a third, but cracks it and we have to hurry throw it into the sink.

One night I ask Andrew why he likes me and he says I like how you respect me, I like the way you listen to me when I talk.

Everybody knows the best part of dating someone is in the beginning when you don’t actually know them yet.

A few minutes later I tell him I’m tired maybe he shouldn’t spend the night. He is mad. He drove forty minutes through traffic to get to my house, but if I fuck him I’m going to want to kill myself.

Later in the week Andrew calls me. I let it ring because I’m at work, he calls three times then leaves a voicemail. I go and listen to it in the back standing by the big vault, feeling secure by the sheer cold weight of it. The voicemail says

Don’t be a fucking dick then a big sigh then

uh yeah, I have a tupperware of yours, also

we should hang out at some point.

When we were dating my ex and I went to a friend's wedding. It was held at the school the bride worked at, and all the bathroom facilities were made for children, short toilets, tiny faucets. I felt storkish and unbearably light in my heels, too giant for this world. After the ceremony my ex told me I was the kind of girl he would marry.

Scorpios govern the eighth astrological house, the house of regeneration – birth death sex taxes. Its symbol is the phoenix. At the end of its life the phoenix builds its funeral pyre and burns in the flames only to propagate from the ashes, impossible to destroy.