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My friend Peppa, who, back in the days of school dining halls, wore bows in her hair the size of pancakes, wanted to go together on the train from Penn Station. I texted no. I had my children with me, and she was on lithium. Any conversation could mean losing them, as had happened before. And now here we were, looking up at the track numbers on the big board. I folded my trench coat over my arm and tried to look unruffled.

Others of our cohort scrambled in, their bags fat, some I'd known and one I hadn't-- unremarkable at first, cheerful, running shoes tied to his backpack. He'd managed to buy a ticket on the spot, jumping the line to hold a 4-seater with his blazer lain tidily there, while the rest of us with our reservations were still shuffling down the escalator.

"Heavyweight, or lightweight?" I asked, later, on the subject of rowing. My children peered into their video games. He proffered a bicep; I poked a prudish finger, "heavyweight?"

"You married people have all the fun," he said. Tattersall shirt. His puzzling bluffs made the trip pass quickly. Perhaps the rower had not stood by as his ceiling lights were smashed at the end of a broomstick. Or sat in a car driven recklessly, as punishment. He perfectly well could have been married if he'd wanted to be. I thought of that later.

I dragged my rolling bags over muddy bricks through the crisscross of the quadrangle, and made up three narrow beds in flat sheets and alumni association blankets that had been folded in squares and set on the top bunks. My children fell easily into their reunion junkets; energetic undergraduates put them in logo t-shirts and caps and from the college, and passed out teddy bears in tiny college scarves. I saw the rower at various events, a screening of classmates

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in Film and Video, a forum by classmates Repairing Climate Change, a class photo on the great steps in the rain. Perfect posture, his cup of blueberries spilled on the ground.

A former suite mate, let's call her "Hong Kong," spoke out of the side of her mouth. Was it an affectation, Peppa wanted to know? (Had she suffered a stroke?) No, she always spoke thus. Hong Kong invited me to her house in Palermo for the festival, bring the family, she offered. When was the last time I'd been out of the country? I wasn't sure, maybe 2001.

If you've ever found yourself by domestic arrangement, or legal taxpayer with, someone who might throw a glass bottle at your head, or cut up the contents of your wallet with a scissor, or remove your glasses and crush them in his hand, then you know, how, over years, the derision accumulates, making many daily things impossible. And the shame of the inaction will cause dissociation, even from you, Story.

"You were one of the cool kids," the rower announced, alarmed, as if my sensible exterior had been false. We were sipping Prosecco in the Science Center, a building made of cinderblocks. I waved at his lapel and asked where he'd been when I knocked on my way to Climate Change.

"Napping," he raised one eyebrow. To my surprise, a friend, Brownie, sexy with loose dark hair, suddenly asked the rower if he wanted to marry her. "Mazel Tov!" Peppa croaked, further embarrassing me. I looked down at my shoes.

If you've ever found yourself, by virtue of admission, part of the college, you know how it's like its own country, with outposts in faraway cities, and alumni in Cape Town, or Buenos Aires, where I've not been. It was the Faculty Club, where the rower and I happened upon each other next.

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I'm high as a kite

I just might

Stop to check you out

Music from my youth was sounding a languorous complaint! The rower hung my trench coat on a hook. "I'm not fun," I heard myself state. He led me through the darkened doorway out onto the night garden. "Will this do?" he asked. His cheeks were moist and rough with red beard growth. Dopamine soaked my brain. Out of the garden and past the Georgian buildings by the library steps, we sat under a fat column. What luck! No one from twenty-five years ago was around.

Big Hands

You know you're the one.

If you've ever meditated, you know that god is not someone you can appeal to. You must picture an open door, and listen for what made perfect sense: the children; the fear, the reasonableness of flight, because that's what arose in the amygdala.

My husband texted. Should he drive up in time for breakfast?

"Nearly check out," I replied with a clock emoji, "does not make sense." The rower was gazing into the distance, undetecting. I linked arms and moved us towards the 19th-century brick dorm that was our reunion housing. Birds were beginning to chirp. At the dark threshold: a moment of bad feeling. "Would this be seedy?" he wondered. There was a serious, anxious feeling, like being scared, but a kiss lifted it away.

We entered an empty dorm room and I sat on the springy bed, while he placed his jacket over a chair back. Soon enough, our clothes came off and we lay down. Our chests met and he

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murmured, “skin.” My skin, I wondered, any skin? I moved on, unbuckling his belt and touching his underwear. He wore old fashioned cotton boxers, the likes of which I hadn’t seen in all the 18 years I’d lived with my husband—a hulk of pale skin and black hair in stretchy nylon briefs I sometimes borrowed when my own ran out.

A childhood friend had called our breasts “empty sacks” now, so long after nursing. And yet, here mine were, in use. “I want the whole thing,” I said. And, when, later, after my own buried convulsions abated, and he’d pumped against me such that the stuff came pulsing out, he awoke from his own tiny snore, and wiped the goo off us with a pillow case, and said, “I’ll take care of that,” as if it were a big deal, as if men know something about the quantity of fluids.

I couldn’t unpack. My husband made his loud, frightening movements through the house. He slept weekends until noon or three. Our son showed me his Mudkip drawings. His little matchstick legs needed lotion. If I missed the chance to enjoy him, free from harassment, I might lose a brief opportunity for joy. It’s not forever that I can hold him in my arms. Soon, he’ll be a man.