

Soft Party

Nico - Lou Monheim Carrasquillo

ONE

NEAT

I probably would've noticed how bad P smelled had I not loved her so fervently.

We were at the table with a 24 pack of beer that one of the boys had bought early that morning sat between us. H sweating nearby, leaning on the edge of his end-of-the-night high. Dribbling a little as he sucked down one of the lukewarm tins and listening lazily to the conversation. What conversation? L was asking me out to dinner, which made me spit and laugh at the same time. He was taken aback at first, then just confused by how ugly I'd looked rejecting him and with that realization decided to laugh with me. Deep belly laughs that came out low and tired. Our mouths were wide facing one another, dark and mocking, stuck in half yawn half howl. The apartment was huge and flat, the ceilings were low but the space crawled out reaching further away from you than expected, resulting in a room that felt too big for its own good. On the couch was a fat dog who'd been wrapped up in a blanket like a baby. He looked like a joke and sat very still waiting for people to laugh at him. I'd gone glassy eyed and slack jawed looking around the room. Some terrible woman next to me was speaking french and demanding some sort of response. I stuck my tongue out at her and scrunched my nose up all cute like a child. Ah, to be irresistible. H was leaning so far back in his chair that finally he fell off of it completely. H was large and a fall for him, regardless from what height, made a big impression. He made a slight dent in the floor that I didn't mention once he'd returned to his seat. A few people in the room turned their heads to the scene while the rest continued taking turns pointing and laughing at the dog.

Suck the sick out -

*J's drinking out of this pretty bottle, looks like the slope of a hip bone or something else suggestive like that. Smooth dip around the corner, tight in the back of the mouth and then soft again because he can handle it or doesn't really care. Tell my little baby to come here
And her skin is warm in a feverish way
Like a child, naive suddenly even in the thing which feels most perverted. On the balcony she walks out in socks and a loose t-shirt, the fabric getting wet because the air is.*

N just lies and lies and lies and does not feel the consequences. N just sits around waiting for someone to touch her. What would N's name be if she were a dog?

There is no sense of loyalty, just some rough playtime and name calling. Lots of licking.

On the balcony she's becoming drenched now, wet little hairs sticking to her forehead. She's telling a story and it's going on and on and on and no one's even out there with her to listen. The weird skyline plays tricks on her eyes as buildings snake from East to West, repositioning themselves confusingly. I guess if you're always turning pink for someone new it doesn't matter where you are.

*'I love the name Harriette
but I could not have a daughter named Harriette
because a daughter named Harriette
would be too slippery for me.'*

Maybe this is what the girl was saying out on the balcony, useless information indeed.

Once there was this whole ordeal where your toe fell off and it started to feel mystical, your own body's rejection of itself. It dragged on until one day at the beach, when the salt water had worked its way into the infection and peeled away the rot skin from the good skin. There was a clear line between health and sickness - what needed to be removed. I took the toe off myself because I like this kind of thing, and underneath was this newborn piglet toe. So fresh with no nail on it. Kindof raw but not in the painful way. There were a lot of strange marks on you which had arisen suddenly in the last month, red and angry. Sometimes the body is so hysterical.

*anyway U down to clown?
I could soft party*

Glitter ring. Little bit of sick back up after the shot. Touching my stomach and thinking your hand feels hard against my hard belly. Harder now. Bluesy wink. Cutesy group. These young girls are sweet, they make me feel wise and goofy. I'm understanding and drunk and old. There's some big space that opened up and it's dazzling. I stand at its periphery and look but I don't fill it yet and that's nice for a few moments. Mumbling something about a break. The word cute. Some slow and previously calculated or learned wrinkle of the nose. Right?? It's sweet to be small and delicious. Use it. It's fun and you look great in the morning all beat up and scruffy.

When I wake up I think what a beautiful head you have and that you look so much like a prince all of the time. You have this regal nose which you told me was very small as a child and only grew later into what it is now. You get ready sweetly, telling me stories while you shower. I'm sleepy and only some words make their way through the water. I like that everyone in your world is beautiful and nymph-like. That everyone wears these medieval layers which gradually loosen and fall off. All of this mesh. A good strong hip bone or alternatively a fatty curve that feels almost ancient in its sexiness. Something draping momentarily, holding on to the edge of a shoulder and then letting go. You describe them all with a childish excitement and some sort of genuine wonder. Like you can't believe your own luck.

Wonder if you'll welcome me. Want. Little suck. Small suckle, corner bit of the elbow where the skins a little rougher, then around the corner to the inside where it's smoother than the rest of your body. Thinner skin, less distance between inside and out. What if I bit. Bite-ed. Bad nerve sensation. Big vein. Long clot. Bleeding out onto your belly. Really dripping. Little giggle. Grown up doctor games. Something about handling each other. About not being able to. The word 'verse versa'. The word whatever. The word baby. A finger or a group of fingers pausing briefly to make space for a kitten to pass through. Curious paws on the both of us.

I say something silly into your mouth and let it sit there for a while. Speak out of the edge of my lips while the rest stays stuck. Then

Sudden teeny tiny death of something living but small. And then what? furry body goes limp. The spring in your step fell flat. Falls. Big belly bloated. A little purr dampening out into a hiss and then crumbling into something even less. I like a little squeak here and there. I appreciate your warmth and the half lidded eyes. Then a neck going slack. To feel the weight of a body relaxing into your own. Here's a dip I didn't know about before, it was discovered by your foot. How'd it feel? How'd it look from where you're sitting. What did your foot feel when mine collapsed for it? A shiver and a confused shake that locates itself in your shoulder and contorts your body oddly. Makes you look more possessed and frankenstein in your last moments than I would have imagined. And a struggle underneath your fur that I hadn't expected. Something evil or pathetic about the final jerks of life before your fuse blows out. So I give in or up, and let out a last little puff just like you do.

Whatever you described became my memory too. That's what I liked about this, the overlap of brain till there was no distinction. What's mine is yours but deeper. As in your belly is occasionally my belly instead. As in I forget whether it was you or me who told that story. I like to imagine you going through the day on your own. The way your body might maneuver the corner of the bus when you enter and slip past someone. A little dance or jig or something. The way your shoulders exist in public. I think about it while I'm eating and I wonder how your mouth would hold what mine holds differently. Remembering something being said about the image of a man on his own being more lonely than that of a woman and disagreeing. Thinking actually about the absolute security of a man on his own. Which exists just up to the point of insanity and then breaks down completely. Then becomes desperate and childlike. Then becomes pathetic.

Realize I have no idea what I'm talking about and stop suddenly, noodles dangling from my mouth.

TWO

CARMELLA

"Okay, it's not that funny"

The body in front of me is thin and short from age. In the fluorescent light of the room I can see thin white hairs standing straight up on her skin. Her ankles are the thinnest. The line of the stretched tendon is fierce along the backs of her feet running up from her heels, ready to snap. Each of her arms are lying straight alongside her body, hands upturned like Jesus on the cross. Some kind of ironic move she's doing in her sleep. Always clever, always having the last laugh.

Aunt Carmella's on her deathbed. At this point she's 3 days away from the final breath. 3 days after 98 years. I'm the only one there when she dies. I'm sleeping in the hospital room. I breathe her dead air for another 5 hours before waking up, seeing the straight red line of her heartbeat, and calling the nurse. I don't really care, I didn't know Aunt Carmella for that long, considering how long she'd been around. I'm 16, I'm in Abilene, Texas watching my aunt die.

"Oh, how nice, to scoop it out while it's still warm."

BAR

Aunt Carmella's feet stick out from underneath the thin hospital cover, everything else is tidily tucked away - besides those stigmata hands.

BAR

Gianna was at some bar with her sister for a birthday party. Ice cold. Beer dribbles down the side of a glass and then around the thumb holding the glass. iiiice cold. Debbie's turning 23. The most honest thing I did all year was sit here and watch you guys eat each other out. Uhhhh we don't like to talk about that. Grace is on a stool by the bar. She's got on big boots and those skinny legs of hers. The prettiest hands. Small. When laid up against my own I'm reminded of

the intimate drawl of a bedtime activity. Sleepy tangle. Hm. Now my words are coming out smokier. Grace is in my hand and I'm in love in the way I always am when a girl gives me her attention like that. this. At the bar with a sweaty thigh laid on top of mine. Cocktail blues. Some kind of tequila in the lowest part of my belly which warms me and turns me softer and tighter at once. That red head's out of the bathroom now and I can see where she's come from, a kind of serious shudder as she walks out into the bar again. Green light hitting red hair and white skin like a front yard christmas display. Like a pinball machine. Like a traffic sign. I whisper in another strange ear and forget who I'm talking to.

Carmella's in bed. She's 23 and somewhat beautiful. Middle of July. She's laying in a few layers of dirty sheets and all around her are glasses half filled with teas and dusty water. Dust on top. Tea curdling. She's lying with a head hanging off the side of the bed and getting dizzy. Most of the time when someone leaves her somewhere she gets a little nervous and needs to move around a lot but today she stays still and lets the blood run to her brain. A little vein forms along the curve of her forehead, face turning red. She's alone playing a game with the wall, watching little stars appear as she presses down on her eyelids. Carmella sees green waves and dots then takes her hands away from her eyes and lets them fade away. She sticks a finger in her mouth and up around her gums feeling for some bits of leftover cereal she had at breakfast and fishes the mushy pieces out. She's in a white top and loose old underwear that have started thinning and sagging from wear. She whistles a bit of a weird tune and fades in and out of hot sleep.

You gave me someone to be competitive with a time in my life when that was very important and I want to thank you for that but - I've had enough now. I'd like to go back to how it was before.

I only care about one thing and that's money mpney money momney

And one more thing -

Carmella enters a little dreamsong.

Dear Diary,

My father is sitting archbacked over his diary at the kitchen table, writing frantically before dinner is served...

Dear Diary

Dear Carmella

Writing - suddenly - to his late mother he begins even more furiously to tear pages out.

My mother my Dear mother - please come visit me one more time, I'd like to see you again before... I know you're by the seaside and that it's beautiful there and away from all the hustle bustle of the city (it's horrible here I know I know) but I can't hardly remember what you look like, and the kids would love to see you, and Lorraine as well.

"WHAT's for diNNERr!"

Dad screams - sweating sloppily onto the page, all over the diary, into the sweet iced tea my mother sat tentatively in front of him when she saw how worked up he was getting while writing. She looks at me, raising an eyebrow comically as though to say - "what's gotten into this guy!" like they do in soap operas - eyes to camera breaking fourth wall type shit - ha ha ! The crowd clucks. I am the crowd, my mother's some beautiful actress on a day time show. We're playing a game now. My brother is the laugh track. My father's the chaotic comedic relief but doesn't know it yet.

My mother sings back -

"Meeaaaatloaf darliiing, it's Thursday remember!"

Aha

ROOF

Girl and boy are sat on roof w unidentified city skyline in background. Girl turns to boy after she finishes telling a lie.

“So, now you know everything about me.”

Boy getting down lower bringing himself somehow from sitting position to a place closer to the floor and more at her feet answers -

“Yes I do, I do”

Girl smiling, thinking - what a fool.

Before going to bed she repeats this mantra - Everything is Mine.

Here we are - we've arrived. There are ponds all over the land and a few old churches that are mostly overgrown with moss and things - you can take a look if you like. Maybe once you've had a rest - I know the journey is long - maybe after that I can take you for a walk, to see the property. It's a nice day for that. Yes, you've arrived on a good day. It's the perfect weather don't you think - balmyyyy - that's what my mother would say. Oh yes - here's the main river - it runs through the entire land. About 8 meters across at most places. Yes! It is quite substantial, you can even fish in parts of it. Big fatty salmon.

Anyway, here is the main house, where you will be staying. Although - of course - you may choose to stay in any of the properties on the land. It is all yours. Everything is yours.

PART TWO

"Tonite I'd like to have an argument."

"Alright honey, what about?"

"Well, I don't know. What's getting on your nerves at the moment?"

You take your position and I'll take the opposite, we'll just see how things go."

"Okay, let's try it."

In anticipation of the

Next

Best

Thing

Sun's going down. _____ is beside me falling asleep. The bus radio is playing a slowed down version of an old pop song I recognize from my adolescence. I'm working really hard to push this feeling of fear away that seems to follow me everywhere these days. I'm so glad I have _____ at least. I don't tell her about anything but still her presence soothes me. Her body against mine at night in all these foreign beds. She makes them known to me. My front half fitting against hers the same way no matter where we are ... I do wonder when she'll leave me. When my accidental coldness will no longer be tolerable for her. And then what.

Carmella's leaving class one day and a man boy sitting next to her tells her -

"It is all so exciting because you're very young. Me - I am blase to it all because I am old and careless. At your age I went out to the desert and I just sat on a rock for 3 months. I came back to the city caked in dirt and darkened by the devil. I was like an animal and people no longer interested me. Everything had become rotton and I no longer wanted to participate in the fakeness of the people who welcomed me back. Whenever you read of a great creative, or

possibly even a genius man they all wanted to run away and live in isolation. That's the sign of a true intellect."

Carmella is used to people talking to her like this so she shrugs and says she didn't ask for his life story in the first place.

Carmella's on her mother's couch. She's sitting spread legged and soggy eating cubes of papaya that she cut up in the kitchen earlier. It's spring but it's still cold outside, gray and heavy.

Carmella's in a pool holding her face above water, her ears below. She listens to the underwater sound of her strong heartbeat, her toes just barely reaching the pool floor.

Carmella is walking to the bathroom.

"Heavy footed" thinks the cat. I walk to the bathroom to pee and she kisses my toes but thinks still how unladylike my walk is. Galloping into the WC, feet like bricks. Sorry little cat but I'm sleepy, I wouldn't expect you to understand, you nod off all day in sunny patches on the floor while I get on with it.

Mama's in the living room picking at her toe nails, overgrown from being on holiday for too many weeks and she's thinking -

I think the way you're living is weird and it freaks me out. I made you, and now I can't understand you - that's the biggest fear I had when you were inside me - that nothing I'd say would make sense to you, and you to me. Some dark endless misunderstanding between mother and child. In my mind we're sat in this white room facing each other and we feel like we're being watched so we keep our mouths shut. I say something fake like "so how's school, how's Michaella?" and you say "It's okay, she's not my friend anymore" and I feel bad for knowing so little about your life, about you. The way you answer my lame question isn't malicious like you hate me, it's more tired - like you pity me. And the way I ask is the same. So we're in a loop of feeling bad for each other for not supplying the right relationship. You don't look like me. I'm uncomfortable and unsupportive.

Sitting in the womb I'm sticky and 28 weeks into development. Thin slices of toenails and goey eyeballs are hardening into something I'll be able to work with in a couple months. My mother's mother has transplanted stress and fear into our murky wombs and now we're all a little nervous. Mrs. Dupont swallows her glass of red wine in one gulp. The top layer is thick with grease from the roast suckling pig Mr. Dupont made for dinner. It's little carcass syrups having penetrated the room, making the air in the house wet with cooked meat juices. Mrs. Dupont breathes in deeply and imagines droplets of fat adhering to her lung polyps. Mrs. Dupont is going crazy from the baby in her belly. She slurps down another slither of meat and dismisses

herself from the room. Has a cigarette out the window of her bedroom screaming "I don't want to share!" into the hills beyond the house.

The cat's lying in the hallway in front of a mirror, lounging as per. I walk out heading to the bathroom and she stops me. She says :

"Don't you think I look especially pretty today? More so than usual?"

I say no, you look as attractive as always. And you do always look good, isn't that enough for you?"

She says no and turns back to the mirror, her most trustworthy friend.

I walk heavy to the bathroom knowing she is hyper aware of my iron feet. The cat's lucky. She's poised. She's pampered both by herself and others . She's slender and her coat is always shining. When I leave the bathroom she turns her head in 360 degree owl-like fashion and with this move instantly exposes my own lack of grace. I used to shrink when she looked at me, now I hold my ground so that my monstrous body looms over her tiny, sexy one. She can't always have the last word.

Everyone is standing in front of me and I am thinking to myself - which one am I dedicating this life to. I have an endless amount of lives, one day I will exhaust myself and decide not to fill another body and finally I will rest but until then I can go again and again. My mother always returns, either as sister or aunt. My father joins, as lover or best friend. As pet. As boss. A million variations for the family unit. Maybe in a past life I killed you. In a past life I was beheaded. In a future one I'll have one arm amputated, the right one. By now you've played every role. I fed you from my breast in one life and now you're licking me again in other ways. Everything becomes symbolic, a twisted hint.

PART THREE

Being the first to arrive home that day from school, P and Y were the kids who baptized the newly laid floor of the courtyard below their flat. The old floor, soaked with piss and trash juice had been deemed by the parents of the block as a 'no play zone', but this morning two men had come and dug up the gravel and left behind a flat piece of land, polished and clean, resembling a slick sort of black tar. Having watched it's holy creation with their own eyes, the mothers couldn't keep their children off of the floor - so undeniable was it's newness.

P sits on the asphalt, testing how hot it is with the soft underside of his paw. London's unusual sun has already begun baking the tar, seeming to finish off the job by cooking the still gooey black into something fully hardened. The men this morning, who'd come with sledge hammers

and hard hats, had ripped the previous floor up from beneath their own feet. P sits, imagining what else might have come up with it, continuing to test his thin skin on the new burning floor.

PART FOUR

T was not the kind of man I would usually go for but something about his air of indecency, money and sex had got me interested. What's the point of being a woman. I want everyone in the room to desire me all of the time. I kick my little pink booties in the air and arch my back like a dog, I know how the game goes. Someone tells me I always look slutty but in a subtle way. Someone gets all close to my face and tells me 'you know everyone in this building wants to fuck you'. Her prosecco breath tickling the inside of my ear and getting me all hot. As in getting me sick. As in I can't explain.

Either way, it felt good to tell the man in my bed that he was stupid. That he was too loud and that his jokes at the dinner table were borderline offensive, also just un-funny. This desire to be the mean one, a desire already accomplished. You are mean!

While you were asleep I touched all of the things in your room.

Why? Out of spite?

I just wanted to make my mark - now I'm definitely here. Indelible little fingerprints all over your shit.

That doesn't bother me.

What do you mean?

As in, I don't mind. Lick it all - what do I care.

Carmella's mother tells me she is asleep in the other room. Her body is warm beneath a thick sweaty duvet. I put my hand across her unconscious forehead and wipe away a little fever grease. Three times a year Carmella becomes sick and sweats a lot and something green comes out of a lot of her orifices and in it's own way it mummifies her and casts her in a hard opaque resin and she becomes very stiff inside rigor mortis setting in but then, suddenly, she becomes soft again and all of her bones recalibrate and her pores are cleaned out and her muscles are massaged to a state where they are nearly as new as when she popped out the womb the first time. After each sickness she is completely refreshed, made new again, dissolved into a gaseous state and then reformed as a solid. Slips through a liquid - this is her favorite part - like a full body orgasm, the good part right before the release lasting for what feels

like days. She is lying there sick and the whole house, the whole family, all her friends and whoever might be her boss at the time just let her do it they give her the time to. Days and days off just lying there wet. A puddle of sick. A puddle of girl turning green and then pink again. Some people - me - coming to watch for a bit. To see a body in a state of change and still visually at such ease. To watch and to see almost no trace of the shift inside. Carmella's belly - oh. Carmella's belly rose and fell the way bellies do under the sun. Hot and baking on the inside, the hair on the surface turning white against the skin turning an earthy reddish brown underneath. It was an honor to watch Carmella sleep in these times - really, it was my honor.

PART FIVE

All men are immortal.

Here is a picture of my best friend the morning after she lost her virginity, doe eyed and relieved. Not a completely successful break into this half of her life, but alright - if it needs be. He was cute enough and played that confident tanned boy body role of 'charming' well for his age. Would become a monster probably, a master at it. I had given him that all-knowing look then already - which said something along the lines of 'I know' or 'Me too'. Fucking each other over. Fucking each others friends over, fucking each others friends full stop. Even then the potential to go further - to switch bodies to get so knock out drunk that we meet each other in different rooms. Having coffee with one instead of the other one morning because someone needs to sleep in longer. Sleep stuck in the corners of eyes, yellow and (demanding) fat lips. A sideways look on the beach towards some stretched muscle on a back or a belly running tight beneath a dress. This one's mine. Which one? Him! Seeing double suddenly, rocking into each other a bit. These boys were like that and even in the innocence of some sticky summer sweet romance the opportunity was there. Let him hear from downstairs so it's like he's in this with us. Let him get in from below. Just let him in the bed! What happens when 6 sunstroked bodies with bellies full of Whispering Angel collide is especially soft.

Here is the dream Carmella dreamed in her third round of sickness this year, the last one of 2016. Lying in bed during one of the early days - a fresh sickness - she dreamt :

P is lying on the ground. He has been on the tacky asphalt forever. He is part boy part floor. In the dream my mother is a furious business lady. In the dream I am engulfed in a fire. Fire eats me up.

THREE

OCTOBER

In the diner there are 5 booths, 3 on the longer side of the room and 2 on the other. Because it's deep winter and just began blizzarding outside, everyone has hung up their wet coats which are dripping and making puddles on the floor. All the coats are hung on long poles which are attached to the side of the booths. With a hat set at the top and a jacket hanging below they form the shape of a man, looming over each table. A mirage of guards. Of haunting protectors.

The blizzard outside was getting progressively worse while Amabel had her chicken noodle soup and a milkshake. She came here every day as it was the last remaining relic of the neighborhood as it had been before. It smelled warmly stale and old inside, large pots of soup bubbling over and getting thicker. Every now and then the waitress would walk over to the stove with a mug of warm water and pour it into the soup to thin it out. The waitress was older, in her late 40's, but wore a small sexy outfit. A dress and an apron which could have easily come from a costume shop. It was worn thin and the apron particularly was covered in muted colorful smears of icing from the cakes sitting on the counter top.

Outside the diner the snow was building steadily. Amabel thought of a winter before, when she'd been in London during the whitest Christmas of the decade, and slept with the windows of the attic open so that the room filled with snow. At that time she'd been in love with the man who'd forced her to come to England, and then forced her out to the countryside, where it was completely still and nothing ever happened. She lived in front of a small courtyard, which several other buildings looked out onto as well. She rarely saw another human entering or exiting the other flats. She herself left seldom. Although it was uncommon for England to receive so much snow, that winter they had been heavily covered. In her occasional, tepid attempts to leave, the snow would be piled up so high outside of her front door that she could not get out. She began dreaming that the man who'd brought her here was in control of the weather, had demanded the snow to come so that she couldn't leave. Although she began to hate him she figured she wasn't missing out on much that was going on in the outside world and so came to terms with being stuck in the room.

The man rarely visited her. She stayed in the attic and wrote slow, strange stories which were very long but went nowhere. She had a neat pile of all the writing she'd done on the desk, one story atop the last until the papers altogether reached nearly a meter into the air. The man had left very good quality paper in the room - so heavy it felt almost like cardstock - and so the tower did not so much as sway even when the snow and wind came in through the windows.

Amabel stopped daydreaming briefly and returned to the diner. She could see that the park was now nearly completely covered in white. She did not know how easily she could get home at this point, and so ordered another bowl of chicken noodle soup to delay her trip.

One morning the man came home, acting as though he'd been there all along. He walked in the front door holding a family sized blue top milk carton and some cereal. I walked down to the kitchen in a pair of old boxers and a large t-shirt with a sweater underneath. The house was cold because I had never figured out how the heating worked. I wore thick socks that allowed me to slide smoothly down the stairs from the attic to the rest of the house. Everything was carpeted in oatmeal colored rug. When I arrived at the door of the kitchen the man looked at me first quizzically, then with delayed admiration, as though he'd forgotten I was there but was, after all, glad to have this unannounced guest.

"And how are we this morning?"

The man had a tendency to come off as extremely camp on occasion. It was something I'd originally found endearing, and had aided in my falling in love with him. I was naively attracted by seeing a man flirt with his feminine side, a trait so unknown to me. Yet now it irked me and seemed almost disgusting. The twangy high pitched tone of his voice, his physicality toying with over embellished womanliness. And here I was locked in the tower like a modern day Rapunzel in a shitty little town. Ha ha. My prince was a fraud.

Having been alone for so long I had nearly forgotten how to speak. I would hum to myself in the attic, whistle little symphonies sometimes to pass the time, but talk to myself? No, I had not yet crossed that threshold of loneliness.

I made an attempt to say hello which came out more like a gurgling noise. The man laughed, looked at me with his head cocked and pouted a little, how cute I was, like a child - cooing. As it was clear I would not be the leader of this conversation he took over.

"I've just been down by the water, where we had lunch last summer when the old drunk man came up to us and said you looked delicious, and you were scared because you thought he could do something to you since it was just the three of us up on that big empty field." I nodded, I remembered. The drunk man had been strange and frothy at the mouth from all the beer bubbling back up from his belly. My man had engaged in conversation with him for a significant amount of time. I sat between the two of them and pulled weird faces while eating Wotsits. Nothing would make the drunk man go away so I just left them both there and went for a walk on my own. I don't remember what happened after that.

This is how a lot of my memories end nowadays. They finish abruptly, often with myself walking away into something indescribable simply because it is insignificant. I walk into a road, and a new memory of something else begins - unlinked to the previous. I walk out towards the field, and something happens in which the drunk man and my man are no longer involved. All my memories unlinked from each other, no continuity. Time like a soup.

He was home very briefly, in fact, only exactly as long as it took him to finish the milk. When he left, I sat in the garden for a while, it was cold but the sun shined harshly for the latter half of the day.

One night when I was living in that house, I decided to go out. It had been a mild week and no new snow had fallen. There had even been a day or two of that winter kind of sun that is persistent and melts everything away. On a Friday night I put on some real clothing and slipped out of the front door and onto the single road which led through the entire town. It was the main road, the alley ways, back and side streets combined for it was the only road at all. The town had been constructed this way long ago and it had produced a very odd and unfamiliar societal structure. It was something about the directness of the place, of not being able to avoid walking past something, of having your options taken away. When people came to visit the town they found it endearing and juvenile. However the people who are from here find it very difficult to go to cities with more than one road and so the people from here don't leave.

On this night Amabel walked down the road towards where the club was. It was called the Stereo Box Club and it had a big light up sign on the outside which was always guarded by a middle aged bouncer from Puerto Rico. He was one of the very few foreigners who lived permanently in the town. Amabel couldn't remember how far along the main road the Stereo Box Club was but since you could not possibly get lost in this town she just kept going for a very long time in the dark until she saw the Puerto Rican at the door bathed in a purple orange fluorescent light and stopped.

"Who's playing tonight?"

Her voice came out strained from lack of use but sounded cool still and she was reminded momentarily of her life before all this. The thought was fleeting and nearly unconscious, she had mostly just felt a quick bolt of pleasure from hearing herself speak and thinking that at least her voice was not un-sexy. She looked at the bouncer's face and then could not look away. She looked for a million years. Standing underneath the Stereo Box Club neon sign the bouncer and Amabel stayed soaked in orange looking at each other for eternity.

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I wake up to both of George's hands on my back, planted on the sides of my ribcage ready to make a dramatic crack. My spine, runny wonky down the middle is his guideline, while the fleshier parts around my skeleton are what he holds on to in preparation. His goal is to bring both of my shoulder blades as close together as possible until the center splits and spills something out which might finally satisfy him. Because George doesn't sleep it doesn't matter what time it is when this is happening.

One night he tells me that when I go to sleep he walks around the periphery of my room in smaller and smaller circles towards the middle touching every object in the space until nothing has been left unturned. His insomnia sounds boring and torturous to me. His idleness

unproductive. Focused in on the wrong things. If I had double the hours in the day I'd be the smartest person in every room.

I think about kissing you upside down. Fat top of tongue against fat top of tongue. You look wonderful

with that bit of snot dripping from your nose like a sick puppy or a young boy. The love I feel for you is like the love you feel for someone else's kid, someone you babysit every once in a while and see growing in strange sudden jumps and so that they remind you especially of how time goes and what 3 versus 5 versus 8 looks like in an innocent but frightening way.

Anyway, we're walking.

London is so blue.

Today there's some red in the sky as well - behind us where the sun is setting the city is soaked in it. Next to me on the bench your face and the sky change together.

By the time we leave it's nearly dark and I say "Now you're all purple and blue, like a bruise." We go back home and that night I dream of punching a woman in a bathroom stall.

I wake up sticky, cold sweats from sleeping in your bed and feeling unfamiliar there. The skyline outside your bedroom window feels very different to how I imagined this city would look from afar. Being here breaks my deja-vu mornings. My bathroom smells like the zoo, like animal shit and wet hay. Your bathroom smells like coconut hair gel. I'm having a cigarette on the balcony and thinking still that the skyline here isn't right. A little crooked and that building there just doesn't exist, yet from up on top of the hill you live on it does. A fabricated horizon. A magic one. Animated suddenly, buildings and bridges come and go as they please. The London Eye unravels cat like and takes a walk, returning to the shore by the evening and curling up again to do its job.

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My mother in the sweat soaked state of her menopausal heat waves used to embarrass me but not anymore. It's impressive to watch a body expel so much, and so suddenly. I have not seen other women sweat as my mother does, and while I'm sure it happens - as all women go through this aggressive reverse puberty - I suspect they do it more shyly or quietly than she does.

My mother's side of the family sweats and stares with enthusiasm. They do it without any sense of holding back, the way most people with 'manners' do - making some attempt to keep their staring hidden, discrete, selective. This family stares ruthlessly, in all directions, at everything. Sweating is the same - they drip incessantly. Pearls build up on the skin above their brows, small salty domes, and are wiped away intermittently by a damp blue rag (always this). The skin stays matte for a moment, then quickly some new wetness percolates through their pores and appears again in sparkling dewy drops. It's piggish I guess, as if they've always just finished a

labouring job. To have a body in a constant state of wetness is something rare and reminiscent of island heat and summer. But when taken out of this context it is stranger, potentially dirty - yet isn't. It seems at times almost especially healthy, for the sodium content of your body to be released and replenished so frequently. Flushed out. Ultimately more pure than the others - who tend to hold it all in.

I am disturbed by very little but when you pull at my eyelids making my entire eyeball visible, anatomically circular and set within the bone socket of my face I am admittedly unsettled. It must be something about how standard and dead I look - a complete loss of identity at seeing my insides so clearly (and them looking so much like everyone else's!)

I am 14 and my mother is sweating a lot in the middle of winter. I get home and she's in the bath, which is a place we can be where there is no distinction between body and water. Her eyes are closed and she is very very still.

Man says to wife - I've met someone and I need you to let me have a love affair with her. It will be short, only a few months, but I will come out better by having been in love with this woman. I love you still, and always. That is why I'm being as forwards as possible about this. I will fall in love, with your permission, for 3-4 months. When it is over I will be only slightly heartbroken. I will be more considerate, wiser, and understanding of you from going through it. I will allow myself to fall fully in love only if you allow it. If you say no, which is your choice entirely, I will either stay away from the other woman - or kill her. I may remain slightly altered by the experience, and by not having fulfilled this affair, but our lives will continue as they are right now. What do you think of this plan?

On the one hand I am thinking of the very small pulsating throb of your penis - which I can feel ever so slightly on the inside walls of my vaginal canal when you finish inside of me. On the other hand, I am thinking of nothing at all. Outside the window of the train carriage very little is going on. I am constantly looking at the same scenery until I go slightly mad and have to move again. Somehow I always end up back here though, where the gray takes over entirely and I am filled with all sorts of jams and doughs and made swollen by them. I am tripping all the time. I make a joke about it and trip as I am making the joke. The force of my foot hitting the thing I am tripping over and my body jolting forwards makes me throw up in my mouth a bit. But I am on a date and so I swallow it and keep chatting.

My mother remains in the bath until dinner time. I am a good child but I do not know how to feed myself. My mother comes out of the bathroom with a towel wrapped around her body. She is thinner than I'll ever be. She stands and looks at me sitting at the table for a while, dripping puddles of warmish water onto the floor. Finally, she says, "you look good, healthy" after some consideration.

She knots the corner of her towel and tucks it in around her chest so that she can cook without getting dressed. Her bare feet smack against the linoleum and pick up crumbs as she moves around the kitchen. A million years ago I told her that I liked scallops and so now we have them

for dinner every night. She fries them in butter and olive oil and serves them in a sweet white sauce.

-

The city is green hot in a gross way. Everyone loves it here but the sun is mean.

FOUR

CHERRY SUCKER

my father's shaking his head back and forth furiously. "no no no no no"

I put another piece of sashimi in my mouth. It melts a little when it hits my tongue. As it should.

Good sashimi does that. Bad sashimi lies fake and chewy between your teeth and waits to be taken care of.

I don't know what he's talking about. I lost track and started on my own train of thought. About a dream I had where I bit the pinky toes off both my feet and fed them to you. If your parents are wealthy and expect something of you, you disobey and become unsuccessful and poor. If it is the other way around, you either fall into place or you become rich and delicious to prove them wrong.

The pond by my mother's home is deeper than any place in the world. If you like you can swim from there to the center of the earth. It is the only place in the world where you can do that, I've been told all my life.

He has chunks of foie gras which he's spread on toasted brioche squeezed between his cheeks, making room in the rest of his mouth to keep talking and then, to have another large sip of his drink. The alcohol is purple and syrupy. It cakes a little in the corners between his lips. He keeps talking. A hallway from his stomach to me is formed through his mouth for this information to pass.

Up on stage I feel as though I know a lot. Also - I am the stupidest one in the room. Before going up I order champagne from a butch lesbian bartender and she seems upset with me rather than sympathetic. I order two glasses and she says she can only serve one per person. I tell her my uncle is coming from Florida to watch me read tonight but she doesn't believe me. She spits in the second flute as she hands it over and then sorta winks at me. I get mixed signals from everyone in the room.

It's July and I'm visiting my mother for her birthday month. I spend a lot of time alone and sometimes that makes me feel like a queen. This afternoon I'm sitting in the pond. The pond overlooks a cow field and it smells fresh and mossy. It is filled with toads and salamanders. They sit the way I do, along the edge with their arms on the sides, all our heads falling slightly back so as to look up towards the sky through the tree branches, which sway and touch fingers a little. One toad beside me sighs gently. The salamander next to him is smoking a tiny cigarette. He mentions to no one in particular that he has to go on a business trip soon. "Japan" he continues. "Tokyo". The salamander begins to cry quietly and tears fall on his cigarette. He mumbles that he gets so frightened, that everything is too bright and too big. That he nearly choked to death on a piece of udon last time he was there. That he doesn't know the language, can't read the street signs. He's so scared. The toad sighs again and brings his toes to the surface of the pond. He wiggles them a little and makes rings in the water which reach out away from him. He thinks to himself, privately, that he is actually very resilient and good at being in

places where he is not comfortable. He smiles to himself for being so strong, stronger than the salamander who has stopped crying and is now looking down at his paws.

I met my parole officer at Odessa and sat her down. She had a coffee while I had a big egg breakfast. I told her : I know you're here to tell me all the things I can't do but I am going to do them anyway so I just thought I should come clean now. My parole officer is in love with me and so she lets me do whatever I want.

The little girl's in the corner watching soap operas and eating cherries. She eats them like apples because her mouth is so small. She finishes each one in three careful bites, until she gets to the pit, sweet and bloodied. She walks over to me and spits the seed in my hands, like a gift. She smiles big and there are lines of red between her baby teeth. A killer! She looks too small and mischievous. Her mouth curious, moving constantly, searching for the center. I take the pit and pop it in my own mouth. Bigger and smellier. Deeper. Older. There's a little flesh stuck to it still because she's not careful and doesn't regard the fruit as sacred yet, like the rest of us do. I chew the skin off and swallow the pit. It sits heavy in my stomach and makes my belly puff out a little. At night in bed alone under warm itchy light I play that I am pregnant. I lay my hands on my skin and take deep breaths and imagine milky leaking and whole fertility. The little girl gave me the gift of motherhood but I am still very alone, still resorting to playing dress up and make believe. I never begin to show, although I do remain swollen for a few years, most likely self induced.

*for a little bit of time I had a lot of money. It was strange for me because I came from nothing I mean
NO-thing.*

I became very confused. I started living differently. Doors opened wide and then wider. The door even looked different. heavy and it almost sparkled. For a few years, during my time of wealth the city seemed very new to me. I navigated it with boring ease. The dirt didn't touch me. I came home clean and then bathed anyway in an ivory claw foot tub which sat in the middle of my condo. Impractical but chic. It was always white in there - I suspect I had a cleaning lady although I do not recall hiring one, you see, at this time I was being very well taken care of. It felt sort of as though I was being carried everywhere, and fed by many small white hands, and massaged constantly. I can't even remember how this wealth came into my life. A vague memory tells me it was through some strange business deal which I'd unexpectedly cashed out on.

Old things become re-familiarized and it's half comfortable half jarring. I wonder if I can ever be fully at ease or committed while I'm here. I always have a little fever which turns me slightly mad. When I look around and see a lot of wet half moldy things, sopping, I tell myself : you like this too much and that's why you can't live in cities like Paris you want the dirt in the gutter the muddy stuff that collects in the corners you wanna eat it I don't know if I'm right. I like the city I'm from I like the city I'm from I been told how lucky I am all my life I feel big now when at dinner

slurping oysters I say "my boyfriend is moving here and I wanna plan a sweet little trip for us when he arrives sluerpppshlurppp oh darling where do you suggest, you and Bobby are always going on the most wuuuuunderful vacations slubperdopbulp" I'm very bloated underneath my dress from all the bread I've been eating dipping it into leftover juices from the white wine mussels but I don't let anybody know I am so elegant and so at ease when I get home I slip my slim shapely body under silk sheets I'm like the embodiment of the sensation of tongue on clean pink cunt and I go right to sleep close my eyes and I'm gone.

Girls are always telling eachother their dreams as though anyone cares to listen. I started seeing someone new and I killed all her friends accidentally so now every morning when we wake up she relays what happened to her the night before in sleepy half sentences I kiss her just to shut her up and stuff myself into her morning breath body. I think she thinks I am so enamored by her stories that I can't help myself but

*God,
can she run her mouth.*

It was the coldness of the place. She looked around, vision half blurred and shiny. The way it gets when she starts thinking the rain is fake, when it starts glitching and someone's coming after her all of a sudden. All the cliches. The mental break halfway to insanity. Like some sick leaking out of her ear and pooling pink around her feet. No one else seemed to be paying attention. She sat in a lot of wetness like a dog. A dog wouldn't mind. A dog is nice when there's some dew on it, looking out across the green so satisfied. Limp tongue hanging out of wet mouth. White teeth and strong lungs. Some dogs, she thinks - like german hunting dogs - are soooo healthy. They remind her of red meat and of sheep. They remind her of purpose and satisfaction. She's more along the lines of 'decrepit' or some other word which hints at deterioration and illness. She smells like backed up plumbing. She's picking the hairs out of her eyebrows and even eating them, sometimes. She doesn't look good. She's got little holes in her face which fill up with black sludge and then harden and then get pushed out of her skin and then get filled again and the holes get bigger and the sludge gets a little more grey and green maybe. Mmmmm. It's strange how she's so public about her death. She walks right out onto the field under flood lights and stands kind of twitching in the middle looking out across the green. She's kissing her mother goodbye kindly and saying thank you for all your help you really didn't do anything wrong you know, and she's jacking off her lover one last time because she can't help but keep giving until every last circuit gives out. Finally they do and she grunts and her knees give, they buckle. Her face hits the wet grass and slips to the right, mud stain on her cheek, some dirt sneaking itself into her ear. A voice comes on over the loudspeaker ; "alright folks, shows over" and it crackles out and the few people in the audience drag themselves home unsatisfied and sleepy and go to bed and sigh, good riddance.

there was a recurring theme for her -

- here's the problem -

- here's how I'm feelin' -

A plane overhead bursts gently into flames and there is a sudden warmth which makes the city feel quiet and easy for a moment. She thanks the sky and ash begins to fall around her. Sweet. She looks ahead towards her lover and offers a weak smile. Once she had tried tickling him and it had been so hard to get a natural laugh out that she had stopped abruptly and found a place to throw up instead. He slipped his hands beneath her blouse and felt along her skin for a specific mole. Upon finding it he fingered it momentarily and then withdrew himself. His touch was clinical. Didn't come back for seconds. The city didn't give much either. It was hard and gray. All cement. It was sulfuric. And salty. On occasion something broke and let a warmer thing in but this was rare and never lasted. She had to leave often to make it tolerable. When this wasn't possible she had to build a cave and stay put, turn the heating up high and manufacture a fake and sticky fever. She took long baths and let herself get soft and malleable. Her pores opening up wide enough to stick a finger into. All the windows steamy and the air like milk.

"It's a shame"

she thinks,

"that all of my teeth are rotting out of my head so early on in life." I wonder why that is and if anyone else can taste it.

"if I am not talented now"

she thought

"then I am a lost cause"

talent does not come later in life. it is innate. I am like a rock. I am so bland and embarrassed by my smell. I wonder how many people I can make fall in love with me before I pass my prime. I wonder why I am so selfish and so greedy.

"At least" she thought

"I've stopped finally with that intense and secret gluttony. At least I can move on from such unrestrained consumption which at times had felt so wild."

she unwrapped the chocolate cake she'd picked up on her way home. Maple Bourbon Buttermilk Icing. She slid the black mass onto a white plate and peeled back the plastic sheet with which the baker had wrapped the cake for safer travel. It was wet from trapped moisture. She threw a silver fork onto her bed and placed the plate beside it. She pulled her pants down from around her hips and sat on top of her duvet. She brought a forkful of cake to her mouth.

PART THREE

It was easy to imagine him falling in love with someone else and in the moments when I no longer wanted him to be mine, I relished in the possibility of it. It brought up a sad kind of longing for something which I still had and that tickled me. A sweet kind of torture. Jane snorted a line in the bathroom and came back burning and even prettier than before.

My father, in his older age has become very afraid of this ugly encroaching 'intellect' and of breaking. I try to think of what to say and something sad comes out. My tongue dribbles. Something squelches. In a quiet room where no one lives a candle burns and the base spills over letting hot wax drip down the window pane. "what's happening?" he asks, finally. "it's not working" - she says - "it's the end, probably"

Jane lies still on the ground in some residential area in London, posh. I cut up three fat lines of coke and they look pretty. Her mouth is a dusty red, a slit. A gash or something equally violent. Everyone around me is desperate for a brainless kind of wealth. A sticky overripe peachy kind of desire. Everyone is side eyeing each other. Everyone is sizing each other up and disguising their weirdness as a compliment or as a gross lust.

I suck my lips into my head and my teeth stand out white, then I relax and I am beautiful again. Paris's gray sits on my shoulder and purrs. Hums to me. Becomes sexier and slithers down the divide in my back. Slips between my toes - then withdraws. This city invokes a lazy beauty which lounges by the Seine, maybe rolling in accidentally. Unaffected ease. Sleazy motherfucker. Slow yawn. The babylike rise and fall of a puffy belly. You're a beautiful sleeper, like a drunk or something.

Buy a horse. Buy a better horse. Buy a donkey cause it's a funny juxtaposition for the garden. Be greedy because you can be, because you're making so much money now. All the leftover things which come out of certain smaller crevices, where some genuine earwax can be squeezed out still - are stolen and mass produced. I'm sick. I'm lying in a big beautiful hotel room and I have all these starchy brand new things around me in bed. Kissing me and making me full. A bubble bath is running and I'm going to be so clean and then I'm going to go back to bed because I can. Buy a horse. Then buy a better one.

Ankle kisser. Gobsmacked little bitch. I think out of all the girls Maria likes me the best, because I dress alright and because we use the same coconut creme conditioner. There's a comfortability in smelling yourself on someone else, it can be something sweet. It can be porous, can remind you of conception or consummation or some other "c" word that's not coming to mind. Ooh Maria. I wanna consume you. Cuddle you. Corrupt. Control you. MMMmmmm. Kidnap you. I wanna kiss your ankles. Kiss your knees. Hey, I love you. Maria!

What I noticed first was that my once ravishing mother was now old. I rang the doorbell. I hadn't been home in 16 years. The fact that the house still stood, albeit slightly more lived in then I remembered but no less confident, was astonishing. It was a sort of beaten-in teal. Next door my late aunt had lived. And next to her, another aunt. Across the street, some in law or another. All the backyards were connected by doors built into wooden picket fences. A hereditary lack of privacy. I didn't have a taste for this. It felt creepy on my skin. What did the house smell like? It smelled like burning toast, I like it in big homes when there are so many people that there's never not someone eating. That feels good. That feels full, like a small safe version of infinity.

My mom is 68 years old now. I think she's pretty tired. When she opens the door she's wearing a light pink dress that she wore a lot when I was a kid. The fabric is thin enough so I can see her body underneath. Women age strangely, a lot of skin gets thin and loose, almost translucent. I used to worry that I'd rip you somehow. When I met my mother she was 33, not a young mom. Pretty average. A good amount of life lived before me, and still a good amount ahead of her. She spoke 3 languages fluently and had a soft round voice because of it. Germanic, primarily. A little stuck in the throat maybe. Deep. My old mother invites me inside. I imagine I look pretty bad myself. I've been living in cities and on the highways between cities for the past decade and a half. My mother's nearly seventy years old. I let that idea kick me in the face as I walk into the living room. Not a thing has been moved since I've gone. In these beautifully consistent cul-de-sacs things don't just change. Husbands get bonuses and then they re-do the bathrooms or something. Add a silky kitchen island that hits at the hip. Or just get a new toilet, a bathtub, a faux marble sink. Whatever's in.

My momma brings me a beer although I didn't ask for one. She looks cool all of a sudden. I wonder sometimes if there's an age between young and old where you don't feel the direct signs of death but you understand it's approach, and so you just sink in and enjoy it. I look forward to that. Quiet and self assured. On the other hand, I've been reading a lot about people who know they're dying. All that confidence goes out the window, you're an infant again. Throwing a temper tantrum cause you don't have the capacity to ask for what you want. Or the capacity to know. I take a sip of my beer and sit on the couch.

You'd look good with a hole in your head. A thumb up your ass. You weird fool. You say yes to a lot of things, don't you - no questions asked. There's this guy in the corner who's desperate to say something but he doesn't know how to get it out. On the edges of the room are all these hungry vultures and they scare him into submission. They got hot blood bubbling out of their mouths, bits of old meals between their teeth. All of a sudden there's a lot of chaos, the guy said something loud and stupid and for a moment the whole room stopped breathing. A few men and women threw up right there in the middle of it all, sometimes it doesn't matter where you get sick as long as it's out of your body. People's teeth started falling right out of their heads and into their palms - they came out clean, expatriated with such force and necessity that no bits of gum held to the ivory. Clean socket. Pink and juicy. Some people cried but this was a lame and unsatisfying bodily function in comparison to the more brutal ones happening around them. Organs rupture internally. Things ripped and became infected and oozed pus and began already to heal, the process sped up by fear. This kinda chaos is pretty thick, it's edible. It tastes nutty. A precursor to the apocalyptic frenzy. It's coming! He's coming! I, personally, hope we burn to death. It's more romantic than freezing. It'll look good on film, makes a more convincing and demonic headline too. What DID turn Mr. Normal into a mass murderer? The hair-like tendrils of flames in all these hellish paintings lick the bottoms of the worn in feet of sinners. Like you! You put my big toe in your mouth and growl.

We could still fuck in heaven baby, the devil can watch ;)

It was undeniable that her beauty depended entirely on her lips. Of all the disgusting things I do, which is the worst? I find my lying especially deplorable. I am the biggest girl in the room and I look for every way to make myself even bigger. Stupid kid. Everyone's avoiding you because you're dirty, now only the little kids will play with you cause they're small and grubby anyway and love that you'll really get down on the ground with them. You're good at that. There will come a bitter age when they too will turn against you but don't think too hard on it now. Mom called the other day to remind you that happiness really does lie in the now, so, forget the rest or whatever. I fell in love with my last guy on the beach, that's when I knew it had happened. He never complained about nothing, everything was "beautiful" and after a while I think that's what drove me crazy. In the end he left me for my mother, so I drilled an inch deep hole into the small of my back which, whenever I want to be reminded of him, I stick my finger into. I have never had my heart broken, towards the end I always become very hard and mean on the outside and this prevents me from feeling anything at all. That wet and desperate hiccup cry makes its way out of the other guy's throat and again, I've won.

I'm busy, I need you not to touch me like that. My gut is backed up so that when I speak you can see some of my lunch coming up at the end of my throat. You know, you can probably smell it. Ah! You're so horrible to me that in the end, like a good woman, I fall in love with you. Like a monster, slack jawed and stinking I order my filet mignon rare while you eat a delicately arranged salad and sip wine. I'm playing footsie under the table but not with you, with someone else. I'm crazy now for real. I'm quiet though and so it's a secret and so everyone thinks I'm fine. The role I'm supposed to fill is simple - when I stay still I look very beautiful and it is easy to fool people into thinking that there's a lot going on behind these glassy eyes.

My mom takes a seat across from me in the 'lounge', her pink dress settling slightly around her thin body as she does. She looks out of place. This is my perfect suburban house and everything is pastel. Marzipan white chocolate pinks and greens and blues fill the space. Perpetual baby room stink. Pill popped softness. My American dream is crock potted in the background, pre-packaged, shrink wrapped, delivered. She says "Baby, tell me, where've you been all these years" My pants are leaking but the sofa is wrapped in a thick sheet of plastic so the dirt just slips off the sides and onto the floor. They hit white and reanimate, dirt balls crawling off into corners and shivering a little when they get there. Not used to this kind of linoleum. I look up and we catch eyes, sudden and awkward. How much responsibility do you feel for your family? I say none, and it's true. Now, look how pretty you are when the answer you get is not what you expected! A guttural kind of snagging in your throat. A juicy hiccup at the end of your laugh. It's a genuine response though and so I love you all the more for it.

Daisy's knocked up.

She looks so good in her summer dresses all big with these wonderful swollen ankles. Man, I've never seen anything like it.

I'm looking at Mama. I've nearly finished my beer and it's warm at the bottom in a gross, salivating way. Back washed. She tells me my father will be home in 20 minutes and that I should best be getting along, that he wouldn't want to see me here, like this. That it would affect his health badly. My father's been dead for 6 years. As a form of punishment I take the last sip. There are little pieces of soggy bread at the bottom which catch in my throat and stick in the ridges.

I'm back at a bridge I went to a lot as a kid. It's not a bridge really, it reaches out a mile into the ocean and then meets nothing, just stops out there in open water. I guess some people jump, or just walk to the end and sit for a bit - then walk back.

Dear Diary,