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Quickness

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Quickness

The pictures on the wall beside her bed center on a girl I had known and then didn't. They were snapped back when we used to walk on opposite ends of the sidewalk, pass each other in silence and stare down the tips of our shoes. When it would choke me to try and say her name. Scattered across the beige wood in no particular pattern, a spread shot of memories slapped over empty walls. The pictures show me much of her during our time apart but they tell me very little. I can only see her with an arm clasped around a friend, a Pabst can she purses to her pink lips. I can see her clear blue eyes and soft smile but I can't know what she's thinking, I don't know if my face crossed her mind in short bursts of flash and if I am somehow captured forever in the the stills by virtue of absence, beyond the frame not pictured.

Over a year and a half of trying to live each other down and in two weeks her bed has become my home. Morning light from the window kisses our bodies and we watch as it tip toes over our nakedness and the shadows recede. The room resolves into late afternoon. We are somewhere outside time. Now classes are skipped and deadlines put off midst fucking, crying, and talking ourselves in circles. 'What are we doing?' we often say aloud but then she presses her body into me and I hug her tight as my sensibility and intuitions pry her away.

I look at the pictures on the wall to see how she moved on and notice the faint traces of the ones she tore down. Dead spaces framed in the outlines of discarded Polaroids,

the pictures of him.

Our paths first crossed at the twilight of childhood, two kids pretending to be grown. It was an introduction to creative writing class at Western Kentucky. We sat at opposite sides of the room. I had moved from Nashville to Bowling Green determined to give college another try. Despite typos, misplaced commas, and inexperience we felt as though our stories were unique to us and had to be told. She wrote poems about her boyfriend in an up and coming band while I churned out short stories about drug use and isolation.

Two dumb kids, pretentious as fuck.

I think I wore a beret back then and sported a silly mustache that tickled my nose.

She looked like a mannequin for that band-you-never-heard-of's merch table.

As workshops progressed we found ourselves at desks that were closer and closer together. She inquired about the books I was pretending to read and I helped her tighten up the rough edits of love poems.

I ended up writing a short play about two people who pined for each other but whatever the circumstances they could never make it work. She read the woman's dialogue in the workshop and I read the man's, the stare that lingered after the table read affirmed every suspicion I had about her. The next week she gave me this poem to workshop:

Would you read to me?
 After class, turn silent pages
 of your hard back
 in to film reel
 cast on the inside
 of my eyelids.
 Couches in bathrooms

call to us:
make love on me.
It's quiet outside
in un-walked halls
of the ninth floor
of the library.
Quickness against
cold, concrete walls.

I knew it was about me.

Soon her boyfriend was on tour, and she spent a lot of time at my apartment while we talked about the prospect of living that cliché writer life and watched smoke from our cigarettes dance gentle in the February air. I sensed from the poetry that their love was not as dressed up as she liked it to be. The rough edits were too honest and she repeatedly broke the cardinal rule of telling and not showing. She was trying to tell me she was lonely.

She knew I was too.

Two children

lonely together.

Then one morning I woke up to one of the worst hangovers of my life and a stranger in my arms. Apparently we had told each other how we thought we felt, though we were too drunk to remember the particulars, the lost words galvanized us to try and make things work. She called her boyfriend and told him they were finished. The next month felt exactly like these last two weeks, cocooned in the other's arms.

We were happy now. Things were turning around, we were starting to grow up. Still the guilt was there, that we did the right thing in the most wrong of ways. Romantic nights we were entitled to felt like they were given to us and never earned, as winter rolled to spring the air remained cold. Desperation crept, wasted I love you's that were traded to salvage what was primed to be lost.

Still we had our moments.

And within them is where the film reel of my memory goes black. Coiled together like serpents, our breaths of relief and the feeling of guilt and restraint pausing in moments.

The recollection of the romance has been deconstructed, scattered across the four corners of my mind. Somehow she ended up back with the person she left for me, an engagement ring on her finger that more or less signified that I was a mistake. Somehow I ended up alone again and trying to get back in touch with the self I briefly lost in someone else.

Now in the present the real memories rush back, reminding me that what we tried to build ultimately crumbled by design. I realize in her bed, as another day is wasted that we are the same insecure kids as when we met, hiding from the hum drum boredom of a routine life of lonely. She tried to marry herself out of it, with a man she left out in the rain. I spent over a year bouncing from heartbreaks to ones that had yet to be broken with women whose names and faces I sometimes can't recall. The roads we took away from the other wind and diverge before intersecting into a great figure eight. An engagement ring locked inside her drawer, her naked finger drags across my beard.

If this was a movie, I would roll the credits now and hit the music. The story would end and we would presumably live happily ever after.

But I can't do that, I can only hang in the fleeting moments of bliss for just so long. The story goes on and the arguments we have on the logistical insensibilities of all this feel like words I have heard/said before.

The lessons become unlearned, I am a blank slate again ready to be etched upon. Lost in the moments as they come and pass. I can't help but be angry to allow myself to regress back into temptation. My teeth rot in the sweetness of kisses, blood turns to water and runs ice cold.

I sit across from her at a table in a restaurant, words have been exhausted and our bodies are all but used. It still doesn't feel quite like I thought it would for all that time apart. Her eyes don't shine like

I remember and her hand inside of mine feels distant. It dawns on me that this has all been a dream I am trying to fight myself back to sleep and catch before it floats away. We slip outside to an alley or maybe a bathroom, somewhere in between the black and white.

Quickness against cold concrete walls.