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This is a work of fiction and a novel-in-progress.

PASSING

by

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Approved by

Holly G. Jones  
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## APPROVAL PAGE

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## Part 1

The lamination's peeling off of the cubby's side. I reach up and pick at it for a second, but then let my fingers drop. The banner on the bottom of my computer screen reads 7:12. I'm logged in for just a couple more minutes, so I start typing.

My post begins with #sunset. In the photo, you see the black outline of a boat first, and then a mast and neat slice of a rigging line, and then the shapes—a jabbing head, an elbow—of people aboard, all lit up against the thick yellow sky.

*Every night the sky is on fire here on the Aegean. And you know what they say about getting too close to the heat! I feel something great coming towards me. I don't know exactly what it is, but it's warm, sunshiny, and smells of mandarins and jasmine... I think it's a great new adventure.*

*So, Hello From The Sunset Club. Aloha from the magical land where Mondays simply don't exist. Namaste from the magic carpet, toodles from the watercolor skies and where I've found a pocket full of sunshine along this "lonely planet" of ours.*

*I have the spirit of a nomad and though I opt to stay in high-end hotels, I also love sharing the exciting and picturesque side of every place I visit.*

*Today we did a hop, skip and a jump around the necklace of Greek Isles, Lesbos, Chios, Samos, Leros, and Kos, that shimmy up alongside the Turkish coast—which is the strip of land in the background of the photo. All of them were*

*magical. You're too beautiful for your own good, Greece! Don't let your financial crisis get ya down.*

*This weekend calls for a proper answer to a great F.A.Q: "Will you ever post a proper photo showing your real face?" I've been asked this a number of times.*

*And to finally address this, my proper answer would be: MAYBE.*

*Speaking of me, my food trip VLOG is now up on YT! Link is in bio.*

*PS: Definitely sign up to my newsletter below to stay up to date on all things GetawayGal... In the meantime, you can always reach me on Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, Bloglovin, Pinterest, and even YouTube. (I bring out new videos every Friday).*

*Here's another photo of me in Turkey, looking out from the precipice of a cliff, wearing a headscarf and drinking çay.*

I click Post. I'm suddenly restless and at the same time, drained. My head is bouncing around but exhausted from not having a place to settle. I press Minimize and the window on the computer screen disappears, then I get up and cross the room.

I stop before the door of Web-Star, it's an internet cafe, stalling. Some days it takes me whole minutes of standing here, holding the door half-open, toeing the doormat, grasping for conversation about rain, about directions, about how is Jamal, clenching and unclenching my fists, before I can push my way all the way out.

“Ahoj, Jamal,” I say finally to the owner, kicking at the doormat, going out to the street.

Jamal mumbles a mix of Czech and English back at me as he looks down at the screen of his phone. Sometimes in restless moments like these I start clicking through my own posts and it's a while before I stop. I swirl through the accumulation of each photo, dabbing at the screen, at one, and then the next, in a reverie of such magnitudinal daze-inducing ego, coursing with secret macabre-sized want, about believing the fairy tale of my own life, imagining myself as my mom looking at these photos, and then Silas, and then some wayward teenage girl stuck in her parents' basement or a stewing secretary on the subway, all looking rosy-eyed and impressed, and envious at this life of mine, and I keep at it, admiring the postcard views and smile of mine, that shaking myself back down to my ass in the chair feel like a sort of wrenching. I slide my chair back and cross the room.

Jamal's already out on the sidewalk, smoking and scratching a ticket. The door jangles behind me, then whooshes shut. Jamal's already out there, and we nod at each other. He reaches over, hands me a cigarette and lights me up. He doesn't have to do this. Some days he'll toss me one, or he'll pass me a scratch ticket and say what's mine is his and what's his is mine, and we'll stand there on the stoop, scratching each other's tickets. I don't know if he'd stick to that deal if he actually came across some big ones. I don't know if I would either.

We lean our heads towards each other and squint down hard at the cigarette butts mashing together. This moment is our only intimacy, our faces so close that we breathe in the same chemical-cut air. I nod at him afterwards, our small moment where we realize it about our shared humanity and then carry on. And then we stand feet away from one

another, watching the street in smoky silence, until we're done with this and go back inside, where he is once again an owner and I am the customer of Web-Star. We are indifferent, if not used to, one another's company during the passing hours of the day. I know his soft hum along to the static playing on the radio and by the soft words of a foreign language he feeds to the phone receiver, to perhaps the wife or son from the photos on his desk, on his many calls each day. He seems to know before he sees me walking up to the front a couple times each day, and he wordlessly slides a bathroom key across the desk. He charges fairly—a flat rate each day, and if I come to the door in the morning with less, unable to have begged off enough, he says, "Ah, how bout you pay me back tomorrow," and waves his hand down towards his knee. I never pay it back tomorrow. He never asks about the hours I spend at Web-Star each day. He's a good man, Jamal.

He tells me that one hundred and thirty people were killed today by in Paris. "A bomb," he says. "It was the most worst attack in France since World War II." I will know soon that it is one in the string of the more than a dozen bombings in big European cities, of ISIS spreading out its talons, in the next year to come.

"Sheesh," I say. We stand on the sidewalk, smoking, because no one, still, has the words. "These times, man."

What can be said about the titanic heaving of the world. The age of terrorism and the war on it, of the Arab Spring and the gears it shifted, democracy planned via Facebook Events Near You, of the tectonic shift of people across the earth, of exile and nativism at the same time, the age of dabbing phones. In the foreground trap music is

playing, or maybe it's the background, and maybe it's We Are Young by Fun and in either song, no one knows the words.

"These terrorists, flooding in from shithole countries," he says, dabbing at his phone.

Thirty times the amount of bombing will take place that year below the Mediterranean.

The street passes us by. It is the same Prague street as yesterday, with its usual colors—dun-colored stone dripping with last night's rain and with the disintegrating barocco at every turn. Hunched-over shells of mini-European cars pass along the damp street in lurching single-file, the bold digits of their license plates jabbing DASH DASH, REGISTRATION at the street behind them. The sky is the usual gray sky. If winter in arctic places is gasping with cold at this time of year—this is November, the deep funk of it—Prague, then, is the wet-eyed dullard, simmering with the gnaw of melancholy, slightly, desperately despairing but basically dealing. This street, now, and the others, is covered with a grainy film of never-settled drizzle, which seems strung-up like glitter, or dust, in the swelling yellow streetlights at night—but then you know about its cold. I feel it settling on my neck at night, its scraping at my ears, its impatient lunging underneath my clothes. I've woken up to see the number it's done on my splotched red hands, how its turned my fingers to swollen manatees. Or when Jamal packs up for the day and I can't stay any longer at Web-Star, or wait out the day at the shelter, or in the warmth of some train station or at McDonalds. I know it in the damp seam along a street, my elbow

pressed to the cool grime floor, putting my head on my forearm as a pillow, trying to find sleep.

I'm stalling. Finally I turn inside. The door jangles behind me, and then silence. No customers are ever at Web-Star in the late afternoons so the room's all shadows and dabs of light thrown up by the shiny checkered floor and by the PC screens—and seeing it, partitioned rows of blank computer faces shining back at me, this skeleton of a room, that maybe had soul once but now is station of where screens wait for some soul to log in and occupy them, stabs me with this feeling I get every few days. It's a feeling about complete aloneness. It's almost a feeling of vertigo—it shocks me, how far to the fucks-end of the earth I've gotten, how down and out, how I don't know how and if I'll get home. Two rows of cubby-desk-things with PC screens until the shockingly-turquoise far wall. Trés inspiring. I walk back to my chair, get my plastic bag of things, and make my way towards the door.

I'm stalling again. I do this. I stop before the door. This part's not awful but it's not the easiest either. Some days it takes me whole minutes of standing here, holding the door half-open, toeing the doormat, grasping for conversation about rain, about directions, about how is Jamal, clenching and unclenching my fists, before I can push my way all the way out.

“Ahoj, Jamal,” I say finally, kicking at the doormat, going out to the street. He mumbles a mix of Czech and English back at me as he looks down at the screen of his phone.

The cold air breathes me in. The door jangles.

I have the same loop each day down the same dun-colored and slightly-damp streets—west on Nerudova until I hit the intersection to root through the four bins there, and then walking along the Danube for a half mile until I hit the park, before Na Kampě spits me out at the river.

I peek in the bins on Nerudova but they've just been changed out. Wiped clean. No dice. I go along the narrow sidewalk along the curved street, rising and dropping out at street intersections, over gleaming snagged cobblestone, sidestepping people. I get to Petrova park and try to stand up straight as I walk, but I'm suddenly aware my arms—how straight they seem, just hanging and swinging from my body. I try to loosen up, walk like the blisters on my sockless feet aren't there, I look around—no one notices me, no one's noticing, it's fine. I get to the cluster of bins and take a breath in before bending down. I root around. Some luck—a bag of chips, slick inside, some chips intact, mostly crumbs though, piled at the bottom. I cut through a group of children playing, not making eye contact, then cross the street away from the park, and enter through the alleyway at the corner, walking along until I get to the large size dumpster behind the restaurants there. This one's always brimming. Hot, too. Coffee grounds, the reek of beer, the cool ooze of eggs, a handful of macaroni. I drop it into my bag, then wipe my hand on my pant leg—the crusty harem pants I bought in Turkey, they used to have an elephant pattern—and I start heading left again, until the street opens up to the riverfront.

Ornate stone statues stand watch at the mouth of the bridge between Old Prague and New. I pass along the people rolled up in sleeping bags who just look like shapes

from here. I see Pela, my occasional friend, across the bridge. She's got her sign too. We nod at one another, with smiles that are more grimace than smile.

I look up briefly out of my hood when I get to the middle of the bridge and stop, letting the cold come through the holes of my ratty sweatshirt, and find the smell there, the ripe scrim of sweat and city gutter, and release it until I smell it too, and then it brushes hollowly against me. I'm tingling, and it seeps under still, turning me numb, turning me over, into all braced bones. Pain is beauty, or vice-versa, is what my mother would have said. I am shivering so that I can give myself this one shriveled but alive beautiful thing: turning and looking out from the height of the bridge, it's the usual view, the medieval city glittering, the evening sky, which is getting more and more dim and but also more alive, saturated with spilt blue ink, turning itself to canvas behind the glittery night, and I wonder about the Big Guy in the sky, and if he's up there, and if so what his preferred pronouns are, above the lurid beauty of this place, above my desperate life.

The lit-up restaurants and bars along the banks press moving curtains of sound and yellow light and feeling on the mottled river. A castle on a hill rises up over the city on the other side of the river. I went up there once, a long time ago, and saw how the city laid out below for me like a toy city of roofs on fire, pastel dollhouses whose colors seeped into the next and next then pointed up in latticed molding to steeple the sky, and below, the little people like lost ants, meandering and dragging their feet down alleyways, having nowhere to go but going there. They are discovering that place until the next people come. The sky wiped blue over all of it. The clouds were brush strokes.

That was when I went up to the castle on the hill. That was when I liked the way light and color poured into my eyes. Now I have hardness in my heart like clay. I have Czech korunas which amount to twenty-seven US dollars. I have twenty-one years behind me. The world can do to me whatever it wants.

I guess I'd seen the types before and ignored them. They seemed to be every place I travelled to, the twenty-something white backpacker with a bad sunburn and matted hair and a big Patagonia bag, stinking on the banks of the Danube between Buda and Pest, beseeching the passing people for help getting home from the side of the Karluv bridge, or kneeling on the side of the stream of people or the speed-drunk cars along the flat road that runs one way out of Split towards the Zagrab airport. They seemed to be everywhere, ruddy gargoyle figures placed along the cities I travelled through. I'd see them and it didn't add up. What royal fuckup did you have to be to go from A to B? Or, how stupid?

I settle in at the bridge's side, kneeling down until I'm sitting cross-legged on the stone and leaning against the railing. I pull the comforter around my waist. I didn't know I'd become one of them. I can count on one hand my belongings, and the comforter is one of them. I've kept it with me since the Belgrade stint. Until just a couple weeks before this, I had a suitcase on wheels—name brand, Bric's, if you know it, I wrote a blog post about mine which is in Rose Gold—and finally, after another day of the lost march through Old Town, wedging through crowds and hobbling over cobblestones, my arm straining behind me to heave the giant purple appendage over curbs and potholes, its broken wheels catching at the street, I tripped on the grates of a storm drain and there, in the damp seam between sidewalk and street, I dumped out the bag's contents, throwing

dirty clothing, deformed rubber sandals, bottles of sunscreen and half-used shampoo on the wet stone. I pawned the things. The korunas I got for it amounted to the aforementioned twenty-seven US dollars. Nothing to write home about, but enough to get me checked in with Jamal and logged in over at Web-Star. And the comforter around my waist was one of the things that stayed.

Now is the time of day when the temperature turns and the wind picks up. It's when crowds of people cross the bridge, heading home or to wherever they go. I need to be getting back to the shelter soon. The times I've come back after sunset, the beds were already taken. Right now, though, is when people tend to give. It's always a draw between testing my luck out here versus getting the warm bed. But right now the bridge heaves with people.

I set out my cap on the stone in front of me, drop in a couple coins, hold up my sign. My sign says, **HELP ME FIND MY WAY BACK HOME.**

A group of twenty-somethings pass before me, and one drops some bills in my cap.

“Good luck,” one says, and keeps walking.  
“Hey,” I say to Pela, when I see the sleeping bag swollen shape along the bridge. Pela holds her arm up, and I settle in alongside her, alongside the railing, knowing we are keeping each other a little bit safer.

“It’s already filled up,” she says about the shelter. “They’re never having the space for us,” she says. Pela spends her time collecting on the bridge and then takes her chances sleeping out instead of trying for the shelter at night. I hold my comforter around

my shoulders. Pela says she's leaving soon, drifting up to the edge of Amsterdam where she said in her broken English that the future seems to shine more. She says some people like us have a settlement of tents in the thick trees on the edge of town. She's been there before and people get by. Sex work, she says. She talked about the fires at night whisking through the dense trees and the sounds of the train calls at night. I don't know who I'll burrow into the corners of the city at night with once she's gone. I tell her, If I can't get a plan together here, I'll go with her.

I can't sleep. My head is turning woozy from the cold and bitter wind. Palmiye still presses at me like a blanket of flesh and fluid and glaring light wiping over me. I ache for it sometimes.

I toss, turn. Pela tells me to wait for her tomorrow morning so we can do our loop of the city, and then she falls asleep. The feeling of vertigo and aloneness is rising up from the jagged water, stabbing at me. I need to get home. I want to be safe and alive. I want to be able to know my Mom while she is still alive.

Distract, distract, until sleep comes.

Even on the plane from New York across the pond, all that time ago, I have a sinking, stinking, far away sureness that I shouldn't have come.

The pilot crinkles over the speakers, rattling off wisecracks while he hurls us through the sky. For the first two hours my back's completely straight, pressed so far into the seatback that I might be breaking it. My ears pop and we're in the strung out clouds—the heavens, probably.

This isn't natural. This isn't right. First time on a plane and I can't get my mother's voice out of my head. At home, Mom is draped over her favorite chair, still in her work clothes, her magazine open to the lipstick special, and still violently flight-phobic. Outside the window the fog veil lifts and then it settles again. I'm already forgetting the sound of her voice in the other room. I'm no numbers lady but the plane is now cruising at thousands of feet above ground, nothing but gray dust out the window, and I already feel the weight off my shoulders. The black mass of a whole continent, just sinking behind. It is an indescribable feeling to look out the window of a plane for the first time and watch the world you know, the world you've always known, become a gesture of itself then quite literally disappear into thin air, to watch whole roads and trees and Levittowns, turned to tense, tiny black stitches on a mottled-canvas then watch the fabric slowly, then all at once, come undone. I watch a car become a gnat and a sturdy slab of road shrivel into its one vein and braid along for a while through a sea of trees without outlines and then eighteen million people on an island turn one color—gray—on the lower left side of the window and then just like that. Gone. And so on. Eventually the whole earth distorts itself, marbles right before my eyes. Physics, man. I feel lucky just for this one second of being alive.

I do a sign of the cross and beg for my life. Don't let me die up here. I begin a serious discussion with God where, poring through the safety brochure, I make a reasonable offer on why he should get me to the other side. I'll leave you alone once I get there but let me forget about the trappings left of the Atlantic. All you have to do is shuttle me there. I'll take care of the rest. You're still the boss-man when it comes to

expiration date and other matters but can you and your bureaucracy just leave me alone for a while? Just let me a little slice of the life-changing and the something-more and the wanderlust that the girls on the blogs are talking about. They look happy looking over precipices at water. I was born on the day Freya Stark died. I'll step into her sandals and out of my mother's and get so far gone that I won't bother you and you won't bother me. Why can't I. Just please don't make me crash down.

And you know what, if you don't want to take the deal, and if the plane will start tipping in five minutes: well, this is five minutes where I should be living without the paralyzing awareness of five minutes from now. I'm cutting off ties for a while. And when my transformation has gone full-revolution maybe we can link up then.

There's another indescribable feeling about hurtling through the thin air and knowing for the first time that you're not plummeting towards the sea floor. I know that I will never have a feeling like that again.

We wobble left and right and I heave across the armrest and grab the arm of the woman next to me. She looks at me repulsed. "Sorry," I say. She softens. Across the airtight room a baby is screaming in the arms of a woman who is cooing back so frantically that she is screaming too. Hey, hey...*Hey-there-would-you*.

"It's just," I murmur, in the direction of my neighbor's armpit.

HEY-THERE.

"Big heavy barrels shouldn't fling through the sky."

They come out to give us things. I dab a delicately scalding towel at my face and then plop it back in the attendant's hand and I'm already better. I went for first class

while I still knew Mom's credit card number and where she kept it. Now she's gone and gotten it changed. The ticket purchase wasn't the full reason—I think more at issue was just that she'd found out I was leaving at all, and I'd told her I was going to live with dad at that—but it was a factor.

Mom's last, bedridden, mocking comment from across the room still chafes at me—I've always been an idiot girl. And I left. It's taken me twenty years to properly rebel and here I am, packed onto a plane to Turkey, unenrolled from sophomore year of college and out of Mom's shadow. Güle güle, görüşürüz. Gu-lay gu-lay. Bon voyage to me. Here was the audacity I'd been so desperate for my whole life. Since my decision had nothing to do with being 'right' or necessary, then I know I'm strapped in and en route to the edge along the sweet stratum of want. My veins are running on the syrupy stuff. I order bubbly from my attendant man. It's a delicious thing.

Later, Turkey is ripples up under the wing tip. Clusters of cities drape over hills, white box by white box appearing baked red crust of Anatolia. Huh, that's nice. I'm squirming—with dark, oily excitement about absconding into my future, the terrible, no-good, overwhelming weight of all its before-possibilities collapsing down into the one black tunnel void of sound and light that now I'm buckled in for and riding along, pressed forward into sublime nothing in particular at all. All the solids I know are becoming liquid in the new space. Even before the pilot announces it I feel like I'm descending—absconding—into the red dust below.

We bump into land and then rock back into a stop, and heat fills up the plane as we as we're held up for almost an hour at the gate because of construction, taxied around

like we're on an extraordinarily disappointing bus tour of the Bodrum tarmac. Out the window is cement all around, the ground and the sky the same color of skim milk solidified, and sweat's souring in the folds of my skin, and the droning's all around, and I don't want the plane's engine to cut out—fear and reality are creeping up re: what le fuck I'm doing here. I'll need much more time at the terminal gate—but then the seats begin squeaking and people are jostling around, rising up, reaching for their bags, and crouching in a single file line for the door.

I remain seated as the plane empties. The flight attendants begin cleaning up. I remain seated—looking at the blue-backed rows until finally, I get up. Walking down the aisle, I keep holding onto my barf bag. I've had it in my hand this whole flight. Then I'm being ushered through an open door.

I step outside the airport and the brightness floods in. It's like levees break inside my eyes. Bodrum is in the part of Turkey that leans up against the sea and everything is white hot light and all at once.

I push, elbows out, into the sweating crowd at the terminal and people stare back, frightened. People yell because I'm in the way, drivers jab signs with names on them into the air and call out for their passengers, and clusters of tense families wait, bulging with bags, and a man with a sign calls out TALIA TALIA, while someone else says to me HI—YES—PLEASE. I'm in the way still. My shorts are too short. I keep reaching up at my neck for my pulse—this wasn't how it was supposed to go, I shouldn't have come. But the 'why' quickly buried became in the murk of everything. The air here seems mostly the same, but it moves through me or I move through it a little differently. It

doesn't stop moving, rustling, reaching at me. We are both flowing. The new air seems to seep. I reach back at it, my sweaty palms, which I rub on my shorts. The yelling, and the honks and diesel groans, the grinding cicada whir wiring underneath it all, thicken in the heat and press in. I want to be flooded with it, the feeling so filling it feels acute. So I lean into the dizzying bright heat and it penetrates my skin slowly then all at once, pressing through to my insides.

The airline loses my suitcase and promises they'll call. I don't have a phone, but don't tell them this—I smile, give a double thumbs up, and carry on. This, is the new me. My pulse is weak but at least I've found it. I've learned the process of pushing out. It goes: Push the bad thing out! There's a certain exhilarating high from living in your own clamped fist. It's like being smothered in shimmery velvet all the time. Or living in an ass hole. Me, I liken it to walking on scorched sand, bunion burned right through to synapse underfoot. After the tingling, the calm. The pain smooshes your head through the staticky TV screen, and you can see right through to the meaning of reality shows and jingles, see where the AV cord fits, and you're weightless on the other side, flying through the dustless blue world. I'm in the deep funk of this part of the world and I'm trying to really look at things now. I'm porous and hungry and the newest I've ever been. Look at this bright place—look at the way it breathes!

By the time Silas and Onur pick me up, I am sitting on the curb in a pool of my own sweat and my eyes have gone velvety from looking straight at the sun. I can still feel the weight of the glare on my lids when I close them, which is kind of a nice feeling. Also, a wheezing blue car has pulled up at the arrivals gate. Finally.

Silas and Onur apologize a lot for being late, and they keep mentioning something to do with a P word, plumbing, or, Palmiye, and I say it's no problem, I got to soak up the atmosphere on this here curb a little bit, percolating in Turkey, and Silas and I hug a whole lot, then we three lurch off along the road, bouncing back and forth the things like—So glad you're here, So glad I'm here, Turkey—!

Silas, throws his head back from the passenger's seat, and wipes his hair out of his face. He looks at me.

"Good to see you, Mily," he says, like we've not before met face to face. A piece of curl sticks to his forehead.

I reach up and brush it out of the way, surprised at my own hand. "Your hair is doing something new, Silas," I say—like the heat's swollen his curls. I let my fingers fall to his neck. He's different, too, from the last time we saw each other, a year ago, and I'm wriggling with all I want to fill him in on, all I want to know. Did he really get air balloon trained in Cappadocia? Isn't this exciting, that we're here? I seem to remember his head perpetually turned down as he walked through school. Maybe this is just the light around here, but this Silas has a brightness about him—even his eyes, which were always just eyes, are sheeny—and he has a certain, ease, too—like all of his movements are runny and he on the outside is okay about it. He looks happy. I love it when he laughs.

"It's See-lo now," he laughs, and shrugs, and squeezes my hand, where it's still on his neck, for a sec. Then we both let go. See-lo is still a good egg it seems. See-lo and I have always been friends. Sometimes more, sometimes less.

"Soo, tell me about life here," I say.

“We’re just, sussin’ it out,” Silas says.

“We keep the dream alive,” Onur says, his eyes fixed on the road.

I say, “well, that’s a bit vague, but okay.” Silas’s the reason I’ve hiked it out to this armpit of Anatolia. Well, that and because life, state-side, had gotten a bit dicey and claustrophobic. Scary in a, shit of the deep end way. So I’d thrown out tentacles to anyone —friends, relatives, friends’ friends...anyone—outside of Long Island. Silas said, come to Turkey, and that was that. I was psyched, and, relieved in a big way. Lots of people would have done what I did—I bought a ticket that day.

“Life here is a precious comedy,” Onur says, nodding.

“I mean...” Silas trails off. “Typical Palmiye workday, right, we wake up, do a couple hours of upkeep, ring the bell for being ‘on session.’ See what treats Geth has brought by, booze a bit, schmooze a bit, learn some swear words in Turkish from Somar in the kitchen”

Then Onur cuts in—“Somar considers his language to be Kurdish.”

“Oh,” Silas continues. “Then it’s like, you’re just living your life, having yourself a day, and you look up at the Aegean,” he turns back and his eyes get wide, “and realize suddenly, is the water really that blue?

“We’re just specks of molly in this beautiful Bodrum place,” Onur says, nodding.  
“I think Istanbul is better of course. But, I’m from Istanbul, so,” he says, laughing.

A drawback about Silas is that he is a smidge too relaxed about follow-through, so he hasn’t filled me in on, say, how he’s been getting by, or on what our digs look like in town. I consider broaching the topic of how I’ve been cut off. But, why right now?

“You’ll love it here though, Mily. Every animal, every plant, and every pint of Efes. Even if we’re poor and eat chickpeas from the can.”

Here are the hills that bulge up, and the road curving softly along the coast. Here is the water out the window that’s actually sparkling and the soft air, which, even as we move through it, is still, and soaked in yellow, weighing down towards night. These are the lullabies we affect to talk about the sea.

So, in the car, when Silas says “Yesterday I went for a little walk up the hill, and a flight of storks flew over. The storks were waving at me with their wings. This was all on one trip up a hill.” I say, “Amazing,” and then say some musing about, jetlag.

Open your eyes and see the hills, staggering with the hard edges of white stucco homes, that dip down again, flattening out along the main drag, until the street stops at the sea.

“Money is... not so much,” Onur says.”

“Yeah, we barely break even, working at Palmiye.”

We wheeze off, following the main drag through the ranks of people and lights and noise all the way to the edge of downtown. A piece of rocky land tangled with overhung trees sprouts out of the edge of the shoreline, jutting out maybe an acre into the bay.

“You live on a rock?” I ask when we park.

“Ha,” Silas makes the sound of a laugh. “Other side’s different.”

Here, at the edge of downtown, we walk through the trees and to a clearing, where a large white stucco building sits, with a sign that says Palmiye Beach-house Resort +

Hostel. It's tall enough to break over the splayed eucalyptus tree line. Small white stucco miniatures, I guess which are the Mediterranean version of cabins, scatter around the scruffy grass, orbiting the mothership, and towards the water is a line of draping colors. They look like Bohemian tents.

We go up the stairs of and see all the people on the rooftop patio, some of them sitting in a circle of cushions, some leaning over the half-wall, watching the sun skirt orange-scorched and slow from behind the scalloping line of Bodrum hills. It's a view I really appreciate.

"We brought a friend," Onur says, and people on the patio start to turn towards me. Like this, with the sun directly behind them, the crowd is a single silhouetted shape, and I can't make out anyone's individual face. My eyes adjust, and I say, "I'm Mily," and they come towards me with their arms open. I hug stranger after stranger, and each one says my name, like we've known each other this whole time. Maybe this is a ritual of this place—in any case it means I get to really meet everyone on the right-now working team, along with some guests—

Onur, the manager, and Hailey from Scotland, working here with no end in sight; and Arif and Erich and Thiago; Geth, the owner; and then a host of others that are constantly in flux—Syon; Mina, the Iranian girl who's taken off against her parents' wishes alone; very-large-no-shirt-Ross; Len; and Jaspar; Liam the long-term dude; Gavin, who calls himself Enrique of Malacca and can't stop saying, 'Remember that time I ran with the bulls and didn't shit my pants;' and some girl from Maine who I have nothing else to say about.

After a bit, nothing seems to make much sense, my head's either woozy or jerking around, not fully tracking conversation. But maybe that's on account of all the cheering and clinking, and because Geth's stopped by and we've all passed around his similac-cut whatever. I'm with Hailey talking to our group and then some English guests and then all of a sudden I'm talking to Silas, and that's a warm feeling. Just talking to him. We're sort of leaning out over that half-wall of the balcony, lights twinkling up at us from the nighttime party operation below, yells drifting up from Tequila street—

“These are my people!” I turn and shout back at our patio crowd, spreading out my hands like I’m hugging them all at once. We’d all come from some thing squirming behind us and found Palmiye. We’d have a home in one another! My life until now was a series unpeeling myself in raw layers to others before I turned into a husk. Here I could be all myself all at once. I can squint and see the shape of myself in the dark press of the crowd.

The speaker’s been turned on, people are swaying and drifting in and out of the static blare, and the popping sound of beer cans being opened is like a slow spazzed-out clock ticking in the corner. But in actuality, there’s a TV mounted to the wall over there that tells us things happening around us we need to know if we listen. But no one’s listening. We’re sitting on the circle of cushions on the balcony, talking, and it’s all, what are we gonna do tonight, where are we going, are we going anywhere at all, whose ass are we gonna find on the doorstep in the morning.

That’s an unspoken rule, Onur informs me. If you lost the group and didn’t find them, “That’s sort of on you.”

“Link yourself up with some nighttime lover or head back and pull the figurative covers up and over your curb-condemned body,” Erich says, matter of fact.

“We’ll catch you in the morning,” Hailey adds, sort of sweetly and sing-song.

We leave to head downtown, and I see a shadowy shape slumped in the corner of the patio, against the far wall.

“That’s a person!” I say, shocked. A guy—well, a swollen red version of a guy—is face-down on the floor, and he’s not moving.

“Oh yeah! This is Zoug,” someone says. “Zoug, say hi!”

“I reckon he’s been sick for a while,” Erich says.

“No he rolled off the roof and—he hasn’t been the same since. Unfortunately,” Arif says.

“He’s going to wake up a crusted stiff, int he,” says someone Australian.

“Skipped his shift today though,” says Erich.

“You think this was the universe’s punishment for him, though? He’s been out for more than like, a whole day.”

“Look at him!”

“Is he...breathing?”

“Well if he wants to go to the hospital he’ll say so.” Len steps up and nudges the shape of Zoug with his foot. “Wake up Zoug,” Len coos, pouring a slow stream of beer over him.

I look back at the guy, his mouth practically suctioned to the clay tile. He can't say the word for help, Who do you call, here, when you're slumped at the edge of the patio and can't say the word for help? Yikes.

Then I keep walking, cause everyone else is going that ways. We lurch into the night, gasping, fixed together, on each other's toes and looping down the middle of the white stone streets.

We reach downtown and we're at the mouth the street suddenly that's suddenly swallowed into a whole other thing: a white stone alley, a tunnel topped with a dark canopy of vines, flooded with so many people I can't see the bottom of the street itself, this stucco and store-lined caddesi snaking along to meet another in a dense, coiling maze without street names and without cars. The storefronts along the street-side are crowded with brilliant shelves of tacky things. The man tucked into a light-up cart along the side of the crowded street holds up a string of multicolor beads which are so exquisite and multicolored I want to cry. Look at these streets!

And the people! They move along, move along, the people and their sun hats, their sun-kissed skin, their stringy clothes for sun. A stranger in linen pants elbows me, but she's smiling so wide. Bodies in front of us, so many of them. Where did these people come from? I turn my head and their matchstick legs stack over one another. Now I look at the crowd on Bodrum's main street and I'm floored. They look through me. I could join them. I can join them and they wouldn't be able to tell. I could lose my voice or my head or my legs and they wouldn't stop. I can't imagine the size of the crushed crowd now, or the pounded road, or the way bodies take up space, shrink, swell, or collide, on

this winding white block and then another, in Bodrum and then the rest of them. All these people snaking slow paths throughout the city throughout the day and night, they honk their horns, or they put out their elbows, or they hold their purses close, but I know how they're soft inside, how they're flip-flopping along and they're really seeing, snapping pictures to transcend understanding, swimming past the breakers and sweating at all times, opening up the exhilaratingly strange, to the risks, pleasures of close encounters of the foreign kind, to mezze and sex underwater and to Turkish delight—who will I meet next? They've flown here, touched down, and arrived, and they're honking their horns and putting out their elbows, but I can see their insides and know how they're soft inside, a starved stem of laughter starving for sun the way flowers are. How we're the same. I know how they have some version of a squirming thing, maybe on their shoulders or inside. I could fall and be held up by the pillars all around. Look at all these people!

*Weee—oooo wee-oooo.*

A police car is coming from the mouth of the street up there and the crowd has all of a sudden gone hard. The crowd of people is stopping, jostling, fender-bendering, splitting itself open to make a path for the police car. Bodies are becoming all hard angles and elbows. The car is coming, not stopping, ripping through the crowd, parting it to its left and right, throwing out red light, now blue, as it parts our one big sea, joining our party but wrecking it too, splitting the horizon of fedoras like a great seam. I get smooshed and lose my balance in the jostling crowd, I fall back into Silas, and we're still for a sec, so close that we are breathing each other's breath, he and I, pressed together, ogle with the rest of the crowd at the car coming our way. *WEE-oooo.* We're so close I

can hear Silas heart move. *Weee—oooo*. We're ripping in two. People rush between us and I lose Silas, elbows and arms and other things push between us, and for a while I can only see downward, although I can't see the ground. The world is torn open and falling away like a vein of sand.

Then I see Silas on the bank on the other side of the oncoming car, I put my hand out and say, Hello from the other siiide. Silas says, I'm sinking Lethe-wards and I say, What, leafy-woods, what? The white car is revving it's engine, lurching forward through the crowd too fast forward, flashing red and blue lights with a violence. And Silas is across the way, laughing, calling out, Noo, no, the river of Lethe...

—*WEE-OOO*.

It's going too fast for a crowd this big, it's going like it's on a regular street. I hear a thud and look up to see a woman fall onto the hood of the police car and lay there, splayed out, but the car doesn't stop, until she finds her footing and gets back up off the moving thing. All of a sudden I'm too awake. The same thought throbs at me: Why am I here? In this mob on this street? I don't want to be here anymore but there's no way out. I fall backwards and catch myself, lean on someone's shoulder, look up and see Onur, thank God, Onur, our life-line to this Turkey place, whose greasy head I've been tracking every once in a while on this whole trip downtown. Onur and I link arms and he says, his eyes darting around, suddenly wrought with sober, inky tension, "Just stay still. Be calm."

I say, what? This is the Onur of the I-am-my-own-Tequila-Street. I get jostled away from him and call out, "I'm a sanctum of chill."

We get mashed back together again. “These police walk into a crowd and take anyone,” he says.

I look at him, freaked out.

“We’ll be fine, probably, we’re just tourists. If this crowd was anything political—” he shakes his head, leans over, and tells me Erdogan puts the dick in dictator and anyone outside the deep mud of southern Anatolia would agree. “But don’t go just saying that to anyone.”

This new noise cuts through the scrim of street noise; shatters the sighing, sweating, song between our shared skin; turns the few peals of laughter that coil up over the crowd sound like lonely, mocking squeals in an empty room; rattles the sighing speakers’ songs from along the street downtown. I never get used to it, this alarm’s sound.

“Seriously don’t say it out loud.”

And then the car passes by our spot in the crowd, and all we can do is ogle. For a moment, a silence settles. To hear so many people go to just breath, all at one time, is more than just the sound—it becomes an eerie feeling, like being in the eye of a giant storm. The cadets in the white car have berets and hard faces on, and are blasting techno music, and running the siren sound on the women they see in dresses, all of us masses are looking at them with fear but with wonder too, like they’re a thing we fear but we also made. The passenger’s seat guy is his honking his horn in the thick noise, beep, beep beep, over and over and over again, with a beady look in his eye, like he’s gone on angry autopilot.

And then the car clears us. It moves forward, Onur leads the way, and how fast the bodies in the crowd reassemble and start going forwards again. There's laughter again seeping into the cracks between us. We follow Onur and the others, wedging into the tiny gap between two buildings, down a street the width of a New York sidewalk, and we try to keep up.

We go into a bar where whose light makes it nighttime and my eyes strain, adjusting to the light. Somewhere, a deck of cards is being cycled through forever. My mom is at home, sitting in a room. Placidity reeks. We move through endless blue rooms throbbing unce-unce-unce. I lose Silas. Hand me a drink! I scream at Hailey. I am killing myself slowly. Away we go. They told her to give up even the wine at dinner. Let's check out downstairs! Waves are sawing through the air and then stabbing down on ground. Unce-unce. The people we push through look like they're playing out a single emotion at a time: one guy opens his mouth at the sky and laughs a silent laugh, drowned out by the mix of sound all around. He's, Lively, I decide. A girl hugs her companion sloppily and is Affection. A couple grabs at each other and holds a deadly dark eye lock while smirking, and blink out, Passion. Silas holds steadily to my hand and I want him to be something yet I don't know what. I'd be Thrilled. We sting our throats with raki and press down stairs, where a crowd of elbows and rancid breath rushes up and down. I give a preemptive wince. Then we push into them and the crowd gives. I lean into them, their piles of flesh and warm sweat, the way they smile back, take me in, usher me down the stairs. They've been making way for us this whole time. I let my muscles go mushy and they take me to the bottom. Look at these beautiful people, dancing, sweat against sweat,

foreign knuckle to knuckle. I turn around and around but it all looks like up to me. I almost land on my feet and Onur and the railing help me go straight again. I've lost track of Silas in the crowd. We fall in along the basement floor. There's no point in finding who's been left behind now. Ooo-oh, what's in this baggie? It's like butterflies cut with similac I'm told, Nice. I am smiling across a crowded room at a stranger—he's not Silas, but he's a real live person in this dark room of grunts and laughter. He could be from anywhere! The doctor prescribed no crowds, no job, nothing that will make her worked up. She's no longer allowed to drive. Soon she will be found two miles from home, the neighbors good enough to pick her up, and then she won't be allowed to even leave the house. Unce-unce. Vacuuming music is combing the deep blue air and the coiling beat is making my guts fall away from my body. The guy from anywhere and I stand across the room and then the drop comes in, and we move closer. In the swarming music he is reaching towards me, the real live guy with the cute smile, fingering the rim of my nostril. He holds up his finger—"Gotcha." We break into Joy. "Like a French manicure!" Our both sets of hands are brushing and rubbing across sweat, polyester, denim and skin. It goes on like this. She used to wipe the sleep dust from my eyes. "Rheum," she'd tell me, "that's the correct word. As in, your rheum is natural." We're dragging each other past the line of glaring people who are wobbling like overpoured pints. I'm all out of fucks. "Everything you do feels good," I tell the him when my elbow's are banging against the bathroom stall. God, he's turning my insides out. The women in my family die young. Fuck, don't stop. She needs a safe house or she will crumple on the living room floor. Can you hear someone knocking on the door? She'll hire people for that. Oh,

I say, against the wall. I'm completely in love with the person you are right now. No one needs me anywhere. We open the door. Let's be alive! is repeating on the stereo in a giant loop. We cheers—We will never have more life in front of us than we have right now! The future is a glittering thing fit inside our fists. Chin chin. The ritual is we are to stare hard at one another before we clink. I try to make out the eyes across the table from me. In the dark purple light, everyone is wearing the same eyes. Twenty pairs of eyes stare at each other in the dark, long enough to make our eyes tear. Each blinks out from the same black pool, the center.

When we get back around dawn, I wander around looking for a bed or Silas but end up settling into a hammock on the Palmiye rooftop. The others tell me Silas and Onur are out skinny dipping, they'd staked out two girls they were aiming for and off their naked butts went into the bay, and thinking about that gives me a queasy feeling in my stomach. Across the patio weed and bags of chips and acoustic music sounds materialize but the EDM still rings inside my head. Then after some time, everyone's drifted off to bed.

I look across the patio but can't make out the shape of a single other person. Zoug's gone, even. I am entirely alone but don't quite feel it, cocooned in fabric over this big stucco house, where other people curl up, together and by ourselves. I lie there, rinsing out, my heart all jazzed-up acid, weird beats and horns and strung-out bass. Between the squeaks of my hammock, back and forth, comes the nighttime operation in the city below—tourists lunging in at summer, the grainy music and lilting Turkish and purple lights from Bodrum's main drag, the people waiting against restaurant and

nightclub walls for their night, still, to take up a shape that might mean something, the cigarette breaths along alleys and the sand wearing itself down at the bay—some of it's tapering off, but my ears ring, from all the listening.

And I'll hear it still, as my time in Bodrum turns from days to weeks. How there's a certain current that sounds out at all times here. Engine of a million tinier things. Billions of breaths clogging up the air down here with trying to stay alive. Someone is always somewhere and trying to stay alive and I can always find them. There is never silence. There can never just be silence. I hear it on the street, I hear it when I try to sleep at night. It sounds like the earth creaking on its axis, it sounds like the sound of space. The ground heaves, and I hear its sweat glistening down, its blinking lights, its dimpling mountains, how the haul it carries talks. The stars make room in the corridor, up there in space. They flicker then start up again. The sound of rocks and dust and satellites, scrambling to make way, even though they knew we'd come, even though we were coming all along. It's a heavy, blind cycle. We were coming all along.

The days seep together and I learn how to zombie through them. I find, for example, I can duck out of the hazy boundaries of my own body and go for a walk around the block without alerting all body parts involved. I learn the script for checking in guests, which goes:

Palmiye is a resort and a beach-house and a sort-of hostel and always a good time. Palmiye means palm tree in Turkish and we promise we have plenty of those around here! (this was my own interpretation of our script with my own personal pizazz because

the owner Geth encourages us to be ourselves.) We have a full service kitchen and bar. We have a camel out back who roams around our beach with a palm-tree-patterned-poncho draped around his humps and scabbed knees and mangy fur who looks real miserable, and we have a dog, Raki the happy dog, who we give all the love we can, considering the circumstances. And then there's us, who tend to be twenty-somethings from all parts of the world but mostly from the States and Australia and Turkey itself and a couple other places, all of us who either couldn't find anything better to do for a summer or a year or who couldn't imagine anything better, all of us with work visas and a proclivity for bunkbeds and hallway quips (imitations we say in passing to survive the working shifts, like "one feels like a duck splashing about in all this wet," innuendos like "how you doing," and "how's your heart?"), all of us with enough idealism or privilege to have built some time to see the world into our grand life plans and who've used the word "wanderlust" before non-ironically, each and every one of us strapped with our own full set of quirks.

Onur, for example, Turkish guy who understands fish and also how anything works around here, is on year three and just fucking miserable inside. Onur, the ends up being his own madhouse but he sort of defines this place. Maybe we all are, all of us a little lost and missing home and squirming with that same unhappiness, below the register of the everyday, beyond the frenzied early morning tile-scrubbing and after hours lunacy. Binge and repent, the thrilling flip switch of it all.

Silas is passing off as a backpacking kingpin, but he has moments of quiet and shadows, and sometimes when I'm with him then, I breathe into those, too.

I sometimes feel I'm sinking so far into this place it's dissolving my outline from the rest of everyone. Me, I try to be fun and keep my head up. Little things give me big joy and I say them out loud. My favorite word is, righteo.

There is a script for at-night, too. It begins with Onur's cow bell in the late afternoon, we're off with the understanding we've done a halfway decent and sometimes thorough job of cleaning, when the sun is still half-mast and brilliant and seen in the sky. We on the working team make our way out to the patio. We hear the tin clatter against the stuffy corner where we'd been letting our dreams or hangovers breathe, and we climb out of our hammocks, or our bunks, the springs of whatever we left behind still squeaking, or we stop puttering around in the kitchen, checking in back into our lives on the office computer, wrap up the screwing-around in the private tents that line the beach, or sitting in the calf-high waters on the sand bars, and we dig into our flip-flops and lurch out, shuffling across the cruddy tile floors, moving forwards only to sit in some other place, but it's a move forwards and a new place all the same, in a single-file line towards a place that doesn't wait for gradual miracles in the sky, still blinking from the time we spent waiting.

We get up to the roof and launch into conversations of, I can't handle my full-moon-feelings while the moon's just aloof up there & not giving a fuck, I don't date I just exist around others, I can't die without seeing every inch of this world, I've heard about your ta-tas!, life is a backwards-forwards refrain of absurdities and pain and no one exists on purpose do they, how do you really tell your butthole from the ground, wouldn't it be dope if there was air conditioning somewhere in Turkey but instead we are a country

hotter than Satan's ass crack and running on a single snagged string of breeze, politically I'd totally be gay but I just love *lay-dies* too much, desire is an endless treadmill in the white void of patio sun, I often feel like Frost when I stand at the intersection down on İstiklal street at a loss for which way's home, I dress like a tasteful ho because bitch it's 2015, remember that time I ran with the bulls and didn't shit my pants, *être-pour-soi* but like there is no self, I want to name my kid Chia like the seed, I want to name my kid Zen, what about John but J-a-u-g-h-n, art museums and morality, uncool subjects, I wish memory had a search database function, funny how each of our bodies is an iron blade but running entirely on softer things, today and all days is like rubbing my belly and patting my head at the same time, the limitations of the human mind, man.

The TV across the patio rattles through the marquee of world sadness and I look up and catch the subtitle of a news ticker: A bomb goes off in another Turkish town. The attempted Turkish coup from like, a year ago and suspicions of another coup in the works right now. The number of refugees and internally displaced people has just ticked up to the highest point since WWII. We know that. Millions of people course through Bodrum every day. The helicopter footage on TV that shows people stuffed onto a boat. At first all you see is blue. Then it zooms in, and a black dot the size of a whitecap becomes boat-shaped. And then it focuses: the deck is packed with person-shaped dots. One head and then another until they're hundreds checker-boxed together. Maybe there are more people below deck. But I never check to find out.

“Yeah, I’m pro-lly one,” I say, some sun-soaked early evening, when Onur, Hailey, and the folks from Kazakhstan are talking about lightworkers. Couldn’t I be that?

I don't remember spending a lot of my life smiling. I could have been an old soul struck with bad karma, just looking for a way to rise out of my shadowy ashes and/or of my psychic mind. I could have never seen eye-to-eye with my brother Raul or really my whole family because I'd been of another more transcendent tribe. Brief times—standing in the laundry room with the door closed when Mom was in a mood, and then sneaking silently out to the hallway when her storming was through; looking at a boyfriend and knowing in every bone of mine that we'd used up all our love and it'd be over by tomorrow, and then the flash of devastation so puncturing that'd I'd heave headfirst into the bedroom carpet, heartbroken before the heartbreak even started; when I'd known I'd be best friends with friends of mine because when we first met it was like I could see the color of their minds—when I'd intuited someone's energy so strongly that it felt like my guts were being cleaved. The feeling that every time I blink I'm waking up all over again. Yeah, I could be a lightworker. Totally.

"It's a higher level of consciousness," Onur says, pulling crystals out of his pocket. "That's what we're on." I nod, squirming and curious about shiny new blocks shifting together, making the world make sense. Aylin brings up how quantum physics supports the whole theory that consciousness is the only true repository of reality, or something, and now I'm nodding excitedly because, evidence. Hailey says, "Even Churchill said," waving absentmindedly behind her up at the sky, like she's letting us in onto what her friend in the other room just said. "'You create your own universe as you go along,'" she cites.

The world is changing shape up here, we are winnowing it into the membrane of the shape we'd made, of woozy idealism and camaraderie and mysticism, until we know what we know so well that the sun's disappeared and I hadn't even noticed. I find out later that I guess Hailey's Churchill quote's been wildly mischaracterized.

And we tell newcomers to come on over. We affect cheer and family. We're generous and we share. We say, What's your story? What cubicle or heartbreak or mediocrity-complex have you left behind. Let me tell you about the necklace of islands across the Java sea. Let's talk Wonders with a capital W and bucket lists. The Seven Wonders meant something to the ancients but now people just make their own lists whenever. It's the magnum opus of the 'grammable age, before someone lays down a brick they have to think about likes + clicks, hashtag dilution but honestly, power to the people. Did you take Latin bro? Have you heard about THC lassis on the beach and festivals of the wolf moon, about backflips from the back of a moving pontoon and the Mile High club and how I think I've been on shrooms a whole summer. Brussels is Paris with a condom on, I got malaria in Bahia but it made me look so good, money is evil and that's why I love travel, I want to be luggage when I grow up, ship me out to space right now, remember that time I was only meant to stay in Bodrum for a week. Let me tell you how we live the dream here and how you can do it too.

In any case, the setup's nice, and right in Bodrum-proper, at arm's length to whatever it is—shopping, "culture," beaches, day trips to Greece—that guests may desire. Guests get a good stay for a reasonable price in Bodrum, which they call the St Tropez of Turkey, the destination for any Turk or tourist that wants to party and it makes

no bones about it. There is a street called Tequila street here. There are lots of people who pass through this city every day. Dinghies press into the bay at night, bearing refugees from wars across the sea. They are trying to have a life. Bulging shapes float out towards Greece, one after the other. They are dying in order to have a life.

I wear the same t shirt the first week and buy a plastic pack of underwear. Zoug never turns up and Erich turns to me one day and tells me, you know, after Zoug's fall, Geth handled it and well, Zoug's gone. And when a call comes through to the Palmiye front desk and it's Mom on the other end of the line, saying, I failed to give the people at Pegasus airlines a means by which to reach me, that my luggage had been found, thank God she was my emergency contact— I'd forgotten it was even lost.

I've always been an idiot girl, she adds. By then I've already begun unremembering.

I was leaving. I was getting my things.

I turn around and cross the room to Mom, small in her bed. She couldn't have always been so small. She must be shrinking. I almost feel for her. I try reaching out. When I put a hand on her shoulder, she shrugs my shoulder away, and I remember all the times she's done this. She says in a small croak that fills the room that I am a "run of the mill, vapid American girl." She hopes I don't think she's footing the bill for my jaunt around the world, do I. You're turning out to be just like your father, an incorrigible, raving delusional with a God-complex, and an alien with bad taste at that.

I pull my hand off of her shoulder —I can't remember the last time we'd had any physical contact before that—and huff out of the room to call a cab and look up the word “vapid.” Anger—alive, sticky—is rushing at my face, making my cheeks hot, messing with my head. I can't think straight. Passport camera phone. Passport camera phone. I am probably forgetting something but my vision's like it's all-motion already, the jerking frame of a one-woman suburbia chase scene, and my mind's all mush, too much mush to know. The taxi must be here.

But then from the other room I hear it, the muffled sound of sobbing. I stand in the doorway where I can see her, her thin frame under the blanket, heaving, facing away from me, for the last time. I don't go to her. It feels like the residual past coming up full circle and tying a neat knot, or like, sweet vengeance. What I don't do is ask her about what she's crying about—“what a gauche girl you are,” I picture her response, her hand clamped on my wrist. And I would have been. The doctor had given her a life sentence—a memory disease they don't have the name for, or know if it would just amount to slight and gradual memory loss and nothing more—and, still, that was reason enough to cry. That was her life and I had mine. It'd be stupid to ask why.

I look back again. She doesn't look well. The taxi must be here.

In the morning I'm on the floor on bathroom-cleaning duty, elbow on the toilet seat, head on one hand, sponge in the other, and finally I get up and sort of give the top of the tank a delicate dab with the steel wool and call it a day. And when I join people downstairs, greeting guests, doing the fun shift, no one notices I've left behind the shift. They just say, Howdy! and hand me an Efes, say, You got a light?

This is the first weekend at Palmiye. I couldn't have planned exactly how this reality would have started or how deeply it sinks me under. I begin forgetting it all so easily. I am forgetting all of this story so easily. That's why I need to write it down.

Tourists from all over lunge in for the apex of summertime, trying to grab at it before it stretches out through to August then leans into the fall. The streets are filled downtown with hoards of wandering people, whose faces are so happy that it makes them beautiful. They stream into Palmiye, checking in at the office, milling about the halls, trying to find places to put their things. We've run out of storage lockers and our whole today-team—me, Silas, Onur, Nic, Hailey (sort-of), Jaspar and Mina—is running around, frenzied with work, slamming lockers, taking cash, adrenaline-rushed, our eyes clogged with sweat and swirling with the blinding light all around, reaching out to shake hands with guests to say Hey! Welcome! in the midst of heaving bags into the dry goods closet off the office.

I see two people with backpacks at the front desk, waiting. There's no sign of anyone on the working team behind the desk, everyone else is milling about and busy, so I bite the bullet and step through the doorframe and into the light outside the office.

“How's it going?” I say, out of breath, to the new guests.

They look up from where they are, standing next to the office door. They're a couple my age, sort of slouched together, talking in low voices. They give off that feeling I get sometimes get, the one about people being unmistakably in love—as if I'm walking in on them, as if I'm the guest and should come back when they're not in the middle of something, when it's a better time. They're standing so close together that I can't see

where he ends and where she starts up, their movements sort of have this lazy momentum to them, like they're reluctant to come out and be a part of this world with all the lame non-beloveds such as me, the world where they can't be pressed up against the one they love. The guy rips his eyes away from her and turns to me, not self-conscious in the slightest about the body-draping acrobatics they're putting on.

They introduce themselves as Sami and Nilufer.

"I go by Nur," the girl's says softly but firmly too, settles, sure of itself. "It's better," which seems to mean easier. "And you are?"

"It's Milý. Mil like millionaire, E like, ecstasy. Rhymes with, Billy. The accent doesn't really matter, honestly I let it get away from me at most times, that's life, you let the accent marks—"

"—We'd like a private room," Sami says.

You don't say. I start into the basic script, though. How are you doing, how do you do. Welcome to the Palmiye Beach House, we have recently reopened after a complete refit and renovation and now feature brand new comfy beds and a fully kitted-out communal kitchen.

Sami's gazing at me hard, though. In the light coming in from the beachfront, his eyes are a severe yellowy brown, swirled with gold, the color of scorched earth. They pierce—but they're eyes that are curious too, dancing in the light.

We have plenty of rooms to choose from, doubles to twin rooms to shared dorm accommodations, to beachside campsites and bungalows. His gaze is weary, and kinetic,

like the yellow specks move, like he is a person whose hands and toes have lost feeling in the cold, but whose core is tingling with raw, stubborn want.

You can really choose your own adventure here at Palmiye (again, own personal stamp added there). We're clean and conscientious but, really, we're here to show you a good time. He's nodding and saying just the one. Just the one room. He's daring me to ask her about the cold. He's saying, I won't turn around now.

I ask them do they want to pay with cash or card.

Sami and Nur rummage through their bags and then hold out a wad of lira. I take them upstairs. Up on the patio, people are arrayed and snoozing. We pass by them to the private rooms and get into what finds us here, and they say they've been backpacking around Turkey for almost a month. When they ask what brings me here I say, magic! and Sami says, That's funny, though I can't tell if in the "haha" way, and when we get to their room they say, Looks great, and I mention the patio later.

"Let us know if you want recommendations for places to hit in Bodrum!" I say before I leave. They seem to settle in quite nicely.

And I turn back around. To the fun and the work, our camp.

"Who just checked in?" someone asks.

"Just, you know, a couple *in-doo-bit-a-bly* in love," I sigh. Someone passes me—at the same exact time—a duffel bag to carry upstairs and a can of beer hits my back. I look back to see it was the owner, Geth, handing it to me. I get to work, heaving the things upstairs.

We are here to for the bought-experiences, not the things. So we try to keep spirits up. Geth calls this part of the job, the human element. This is how fun works here. So we're passing along cans of beer and yelling the songs that sailors or camp counselors sing. I'm just, a pile of tin, Silas starts. Our parents refinanced their homes to buy us educations with seven on-location Starbucks and here we are, it's like the debt's dissolved, the boomers still working hard for their same job and still unhappy, so that their kids could go to camp for the hedonistically-inclined and stay kids. Sign me up and ship me out. We pass along cans, one hand to the other, like we're an assembly line for beer, until our guests have them, until everyone has them. Nic knows the song too and soon enough they're duetting. Then Onur learns the words, and once he gets going, he's going, and then, slowly then all at once, we all are. Honk honk rattle rattle, we sing, and we knock our palms against our faces, the way the song says so. Nobody knows what shape I'm in, I got four wheels! I sing, loud. I'm just a pile of tin, the group echoes, our voices raw and wet, edged with sweat and straining up at the clumped trees. The trees spray bits of light down at us. We keep cracking open fresh Efes and handing them to newcomers. Like this I am happy to be heaving bags. Like this I'm so happy that maybe I'm beautiful.

Now the morning has dissolved and we are on the rooftop and it is afternoon, and like this, the sun is not so blinding white but yellow dust floating in the air around us. It makes the space between each person grainy and warm. My eyes go fuzzy but then the center holds, the clump of people on the patio, smiling so that we are beautiful, holding one another steady, laughing. In the haze the center holds—for real. Look at that thing! A

pipeline staked from the ground shoots up, threading through the green net. Bless! Look at these beautiful people, dancing and joining together. Foreign hands coming together, finger between finger, knuckle against knuckle. The crowd at the church of this thing writhed. We were dissolving and become one giant sparkling thing-Bottoms up! My new friends don't have names and it doesn't even matter. Keep going! Where's the next fun place? And the next!

Silas' hand is on my arm, and it's a soft hand but it's a firm one too.

"Mil you're gonna kill yourself," he says. I've been dancing on the roof. People are beginning to turn my way. In the glare they are so beautiful, the sea of faces, all skin, no shadows. Like halos.

"Oh c'mon!" I say. I jump up on the rickety incline and land, wobbling. I put my fingers up to the sky. My fingers above me are hot and the sun is soaking them gold I'm sure of it. They are dipping into the friendly blood of the sun. My toes hit the tile in an odd way and I stagger, trying to find solid tile to stand on, and I lose balance and start tipping backwards. There's a whoosh of black and I feel myself going down, down, ripped out of the plasma, the cold-then-hot-drench through my body like its sloshing around in its own vessel—down, down, all the way down to where Zoug went gone.

Cold rushes over me and I rip my hands out of the sun and reach for Silas. My fingers grasp at his t-shirt and then the center holds. He wraps his arms around me and helps me down to the patio. My body tingles with black warmth, like sand settling from my forehead to my toes.

“Silas the treee!” I say, hugging him. My feet on solid ground. Digging, feeling the good earth underneath, all the way down.

“Sure,” he says, smiling.

“We really need to put a bannister up,” someone says behind him.

I close my eyes and I’m still waltzing still on the roof. I remember how when I looked down from the roof I could see people below in the trees below Palmiye, like tree-people, like nymphs. Someone’s head had come out of the leaves and looked so stark against the strip of sand, like a black shadow, like a dash mark, like a symbol for something. What was that symbol? They made their way towards the shore and then back into the eucalyptus city. Then I’d looked up and closed my eyes and I let the sunlight tear right through. For a while still, I’m spiraling through the air. Spun to gold.

We rush out, down the middle seam of the street, stumbling and swaying along the yellow paint line. The street swerves along the water. Silas and I nudge at one another, walking. The water’s right there! It’s dazzling. It’ll stain us blue. Onur is the first one to run in, splashing, then disappearing, then we all do, wading in up to our elbows, splashing each other.

I dunk my whole head in, and in my ears is dull sound but when I spring up back into the air, drenched, the center still holds. It is hard under my feet and I am standing up straight. My people up here had gone on, splashing and chattering and laughing in the sun, all along, while I was under. The center still holds for a second, then it’s wobbling.

I lurch down again, fast. There’s a noise of water skin ripping, and then right away it’s warbling and soft. All the conversations sound like they’re coming from

behind a thick waterlogged door. All the individual sounds have lost their edges and collapsed down into a single throb suspended and held against my ears. Shapeless words wobble around, all bumps and tcks when I close my eyes. I sink down through a pocket of heat—piss, perhaps—then a pocket of cold. My feet find the bottom and I clench to the gravelly clumps. Then I’m pressed down against the grainy floor. I’m water through water. My skin’s gone. I have no membrane at all. I’m the deep-combed waves rolling me under, the ripped water skin I tore through, sunk so far down in water that I am it, then swelling out from there. It wouldn’t be drowning at all, I would just be fading, until my head’s all ink, until my skin’s not feeling anymore. I’d change shape underwater, pressed so far down I’d be breathing through the sand’s pores. My head starts hurting. My chest throbs. I’d be liquid down here, watching the mottled world up there throw around light. My eyes are going velvety. My chest sears. My lungs are trying to ring out my whole body. I want to be down here, absolved from the stupid white world. It’d all be superficial noise to me. I’m absolved. Look at me, so far gone from that sick sad world. The world is what’s wrong. My lungs are crying out, stinging, and then my chest feels like it’s about to snap. My chest is wrapping around me like a piece of rope pulling tight from all sides. It’s trying to kill me. We are wrestling each other to see how alive I really am. Gravity is doing its opposite thing, pushing up around my knees, between my legs, ballooning against my armpits, releasing its fist and pushing me upward. I throw up my hands, beating at the water, pushing up, pressing down, wrenching my body until it’s horizontal, will myself to be under. I open my eyes and see yellow-brown then blue. White and green shapes float on my closed eyelids, like always, then I open up. The

white shapes followed me outside, they're dancing along, phosphorescent, curling and carving through the water like translucent scrawl.

Then something happens. The water is hardening and it won't budge. Even in the murk of choking brain I feel a push from underneath. I keep stabbing my feet down but nothing holds. I'm too weak to hold. The water is acting on its own accord, telling me I can't be liquid anymore. My arms bow backwards, up towards the surface, even though I wrench them down, even though I don't want to go back up to the chatter. I thought disappearing would be easy. A soft sinking, conscious then all of a sudden, gone. A slow becoming-liquid, a snuffing-out. I open my eyes and can barely see, it's all dark murk enveloping my eyes, even the little floating figures are gone. I beat my arms one, twice, three times, fast though, trying to test the hollow weight and vague, deep pain inside the stung rubber of my chest, trying to sink.

But then I'm sprung up towards the light on the skin of water. My scalp crown the surface and the air strings my lungs. I gasp at the air. Swallow, then look around. My people up here had gone on chattering and splashing.

Someone says something to me that sounds like 'are you good?'

"Oh, yeah I'm good!"

"No, I was just saying to you, 'NOGGIN'!" a guy, one of the New Zealander guests, says, putting his knuckles up to my forehead and knocking.

I fall back, splashing against the surface, the impact of the kiwi guy's hand, woozily. The whole time underwater, I'd had it in my head that if I didn't come up for air, if my arms buckled with the weight of water, then I should probably just go.

Sayonara, sick cruel world. Don't want to bring the Bad Vibes to the party, but it was fun while it lasted. I'd be curious to see where the edge took me. Up here, the party had gone on the whole time above me. They were like the rest of the world. They wouldn't notice. But every time I disappear when I come up for water I realize I've been half-alive the whole time. On shore water grabs at the rocks then pools then rushes over them again. But the wave's not disappearing at all in the sea behind it, its only gathering itself to grab desperately again. Why can't I breathe through the sand's pores. Why can't I. My limbs feel too weak to get themselves up.

"Am I gonna see you later?" Silas is splashing me with water so I stand up straight again.

"You see me right now!" I giggle through the splashing, swallowing any skepticism about his line of visual reasoning, remembering—even now, even with Silas—about being the sound of an endless soft coil, curving—not pushing—along. I can still hear the words tracing along Mom's tongue.

So I quit it with the surface stuff and grab at the hand of Silas who I know, Silas who, c'mon, of course I love in the way Silas and I do—we try to sink each other in, and then I wrestle him down until we dunk under the next wave. The noise from above cuts out and we fall in slow motion towards the sand floor, our bodies, mine on top of his, liquid and the same weight as water, for a second. I open my eyes and the second holds—I see the black mass of the both of us suspended in the yellowy water in the slow-motion noise around everyone else's legs staked to the ground, and Silas and I are wavering between the surface and the sand floor. Then we spring back up for air.

“Am I gonna see *you* later?” I say to him once when we’re stopped in the middle of the street and face-to-face. I’m daring him. He smiles and flicks his matted hair out of his face, and I think about the beautiful in-love thing we’ll be. The center holds still, then wobbles.

We march out of the water—my eyes tingling, my heavy head, adjusting again—up to the shore. Somewhere, a different reel is cycling through forever. But that’s not the one I’m on. Keep shuffling and carry on. We stop off and get some Ayran and stuffed mussels from the mussel men. I say *Evet!*, pointing at the shelled treasures and put up four fingers. I say, Nasilsin? but the mussel man—who is a boy not a man—unloads the mussels into my hands and says to me, No Tur-kkk-i-yee, the vowels at the end lilting up like fluid. No, I do not speak Turkish, I say and sadly tongue the gummy insides of the shell. I’m so far gone on the fluttery layer of slurred English and Esperanto and hobbled turfrespengtsch in the swollen pocket under the eucalyptus tree-cover on the other end of town that it hasn’t even figured ’til now. He points to me, “Obama!” I nod and break into a huge smile, the meat-gel and residual beer sliding around in my mouth, and walk away. I don’t know what my unschooled-in-worldly-ways ass would do if I didn’t have my friends carry me around. I’m not scared, Bodrum’s a glittering never-land town plus it’s gorgeous, but I do not know the way between any road to any road. I have done no case study on the going rate of the Turkish lira. I’m suddenly shocked by how the hell I got here, to this spot, my feet on the baked Bodrum pavement, where the parched shore lunges out to the sea, all yellow earth and blue and white white white, all around, surrounded by faces I don’t know, far-gone, so far gone in the middle of the afternoon

that I wouldn't be able to go into detail about any moment that's happened today so far. If someone gave me a map of the world I wouldn't be able to point to it.

"This twirl's bugging' me out!" someone says. I feel a swat on my shoulder. "She's looking off at the sky like she's possessed," he goes on about me, like I'm behind glass.

Angry lucidity hits me, all at once. I turn to him and say, "Not a thing!" And then I call him a big idiot, saying it like *eejii* so that he gets it.

"Bird, you 'kay?" Hailey's sunk behind the group with me. everyone drift off down the road.

"Yep!" I chirp. And so it goes. Carry on. Push the bad thing out. We decide we will do lines but out of little seashells. We crouch down between the road and the shore under the hot white sky, letting it fry us, laughing, saying, We're regular Einsteins, quantum! gas! The hot sun is so heavy when it turns to sweat. Hot times! Hot times! We yell, *Ahh*, and pick out the right shell. She's talking about an Aussie guest she likes, Aussie Tom. I hold the shell up to my nose and say "Like this?" She nods, her eyes shining in the white light, and she starts talking about, "Usually all I expect is these guys to do is look at me and I'm done in for."

"Our standards are maybe too low!" I say, laughing. Hailey joins in laughing, and we laugh at this suddenly hilarious thing, choked with laughter that coils together and then breaks.

"He goes down on me for like a year," Hailey's saying, while delicately pouring the powder out of her baggie into the shell balanced on her knee.

“Making a girl come for once, what-even-is-that,” and then this becomes funny too.

“Wait do you think we should be calling ourselves girls still?” We consider this for a moment. A car drives by.

“Welcome to the feel-good club,” I say.

“Feel-good-adjacent club. I spent too long in those trenches. Look like sex, act like sex, give to them and then...”

“Ha, like, raise your hand if you’ve been personally made to feel like a pounded piece of meat.” We’re smiling. “Like, just *give a shit*.”

“A single shimmery shit in all the shits.

“But it’s not like we’re exactly looking in the right nooks and crannies for these supermen, ye know.”

“Always going after the wrong ones!” I say, looking around, my heart pumping suddenly on sharp wheels, my mind lucid like scattered bits of white sky. “On the other hand, we are completely at home on our knees on a parched slice of road with no one in sight.”

“No supermen in sight!” Hailey says, making a visor with her hand.

“I think Onur’s writhing with STDs. So watch out! Anyways. Get me an Aussie Tom!”

“You and Silas, though,” Hailey is saying. “You two slunk away from everyone last night—I saw you! You’re *vibin’!*”

I laugh and say, “Yeah right!”

“Alive with vibe! A bloody shrine of it!” She holds out a shell and I take a sniff but the white stuff doesn’t go into my nose, it swashes everywhere, and I say, Op! It’s like a cloud! Hailey’s grabbing the shell back from me and we’re saying, maybe this wasn’t the most brilliant plan, but it’s okay, no one has to know.

“Call me cheez whiz but I want it to *maybe* mean something. It’s delicate, with him,” I say.

“It’s delicate she says!” Hailey slams her hand down dully on the sand and turns, like she’s telling the sea that I’m a delicate hoot.

“—Even though obviously it’ll probably happen. We’re basically already together,” I say and think, damn, lying feels so good.

“Oh he’s a virgin by the way.”

A wash comes over me. I look up. “What?”

“Just something I heard. That’s why he’s so weird around girls. Oh my god, you could totally take his v-card. You could have taken his *flower!*” She laughs a laugh that’s sweet and cruel at the same time, like the taste of a piece of fruit just-turning. All soft parts under the skin, then the tiniest citrus bite dancing up after the swallow.

“Oh my God you’re gonna make me—”

“Gonna make you boke I’m sorry!” Hailey says. “It’s just, a tapestry of love assemblin’ before me eyes! You guys just look right together. Like you both went through a hobo’s closet for fun!”

“Dilly dilly?” We start getting up off our knees.

“Dilly doo,” I laugh back, which we barely get the words out for without cracking up at. We struggle to get up. Wait are we okay? we laugh to one another. “Where are you on a 1-10 scale?”

“I’m on letters!”

We lunge out, still weighed down in damp clothes from swimming , somehow drenched with pillows of heat in the arid air, belching along in our flip-flops and suctioning to the road that lines the shore. The land starts puckering in up there, where the Bodrum port hollows out the shoreline, and the whole white city ripples up between hills, just ahead of the swaying yellow street line.

“Oh by the way, I meant to ask you—that coup Onur was talking about earlier,” I say. We start making towards the door. “Where do you think it leaves us, being in Turkey?”

“You say it coo!” she tells me, and that’s all she has to say about that.

“So you’re coming back here when you graduate?” Mom says in one breath and also without the question mark. It’s the day before Thanksgiving, my first year of college. It’s been a sweet homecoming. I glance up at her across the counter to see Mom frowning at the jar she’s holding in her hands, not even looking at me.

“Here,” she says, handing the jar to me. Cherries, filling for pie. I struggle with the top until it pops open. I hand it back to her. She takes it, and holds it in her hands, like she doesn’t know what to do with it. She stops at the counter, and sighs, looking out at the bowls and spatulas and pie operation, while she fidgets with the jar. Finally, she sets it on the side of the sink.

“Well,” she says, brusquely. “I didn’t even know they still offered General Studies as a major. But you managed to bark up that tree.”

She goes on. Have I even started looking for a summer internship? She’ll try to see if she knows anyone who might do her a favor, but my job prospects aren’t looking great.

I say Mo-om, what are you trying to say. She mentions that she’ll have the cleaning lady set up a room for me. She says, “I’m paying for your school, so.”

I picture all the little branches of my future stopped in mid-air. Just like that. Like a tree truck by lightning, thick, amputated limbs jabbing out.

I don’t know this at the time, but she’s making arrangements. She arrived at her office that week and, when her clerk reminded her of a client call, Mom had asked her who the hell that was. Mom is still grasping onto a bit of hope, however self-deluded it might be, that she isn’t approaching the precipice, that this next day won’t be *it*, that there will be a cure, that she’s not losing control.

But when her voice changing is the first sign of many signs—the new kindness leaking into her voice when she spoke to me, as if we were, and always had been, girlfriends. She is—even if she wasn’t fully conscious of it, even if I didn’t know it—ceding. She’d started softening to me, because she, too, was looking at the branches of her future splaying out. Although her options were confined to only a couple branches, all which were short in length and so thin that they were brittle. She knows she will lose her ability to drive, to work, to cook for herself, to pay the bills. It’s just a matter of when. There is an awareness building inside her, under the banging on drums about cures,

despite the mad belief in the experimental study where doctors would ‘wash’ undesirable proteins out of the blood, just wash them all away, it could work, it’s like dialysis—under all that, she is beginning to put together a picture of herself, soon, walking slow circles of the Fort Salonga house, alone, visited every once in a while by people when they had the time to rip themselves away from their own lives and visit—my Aunt Mildred, Mom’s only relative with whom she has a relationship, when Mildred can find the time to travel cross-country away from her autistic son; her friends, though she doesn’t want them to see her like this, as such a loser, as such a child; her colleagues, no, not them; not Dad, who’s obviously not around; not a professional, so that the last person she saw in her waking life would be a on-wage stranger, no, not that, how terribly, terrifyingly lonely, how pathetic. But me. There was me. The daughter she’d never given a fair shake, because she, try as she did, couldn’t soften to. She sees the one lone branch tapering off and then disappearing into air. But for the time being, the branch extends from the branch to its tip in air, doesn’t splinter. She thinks I am the one who might accompany her to that point, who might care for her and love her and be loved. She doesn’t want to think this, for some time she doesn’t even know she’s thinking this, but she thinks it must be this way. She thinks she can read me like a book. She thinks—rightly so, I’d never stood up to her in any real way, only rolled my eyes and slithered out of the room from her in tandem—I’m a daughter who does what she says. She thinks of me as someone, perhaps, who, without my own sense of what the branches of my future look like, as fixed to threads she steered, and that, with just a gentle pull or push, I would turn into the

daughter she would want, and the daughter she would want at home. She doesn't know I'm stewing.

That Christmas I see her walking down the driveway and her right arm has gone rigid. It scares me, because my grandmother's arm looked like that and she died of Parkinson's. It doesn't figure—my mom's mom had Parkinson's and my mom wasn't supposed to have of that—she *didn't* have that, the doctors even said—but all I know is that my grandmother's arm looked like that when I met her as a toddler and she died of something awful, and early, and now here's Mom coming up the driveway. Right now. I'm realizing, turning away from the window, that this is what terror feels like. My mom is so domineering she's invincible.

There's stickiness when we move. Yikes. We wake up in a hammock in the dim corner of the Palmiye patio. The sun slices in between the places where our skin meets skin—the folds of my belly, of Silas' hips against mine, the spaces between his fingers lit up red and glowing.

"Hey," he says, his voice raw, and soft, too. All nasal drip. We look at each other, our lids low, smiling dazedly. I think a fuzzy thought along the lines of, "nice."

Then the day lurches at my skull, searing. My brain is undergoing the sensation of a rubber band being wrapped around it and squeezed tight from approximately all sides, and my skin seems to have scorched itself off the face of my bones and then re-adhered tightly back on. The sun is throwing itself on us in the painful way, and my mind flashes umber smears of image and face and feeling about the last twelve hours through my head, faster, one heaving after the other, until my mind's fritzing.

“...Do you remember last night?” I turn to Silas and say.

“Yeah...” he answers. He brushes his finger along my jaw and I soften for a second. But then the question. Yikes. There’s sweat like burning plaster wrapped around face, all of my skin. I am actively suffocating. I’d believe it if I were told that on the dead-to-alive-scale, I’m more keeled-over than not. It’s all a lot.

“Well, this has been nice,” I say, my voice stretched thin over the swash of feelings in my throat. I corral myself into an upwards position, kick one leg out of the hammock and forage around for my flip-flop. Stickiness when we move away from each other, and the sound of unpeeling.

Silas doesn’t anything when I cross the room. I look behind me as I close the door, considering saying something about how to leave this off, how we can ease into the naked truth of last night when it’s less cringey. But oh God the pain.

And when I look back he’s all dead weight anyways, passed out again. I creak off. My face is plastered to the shower wall. The rushing water presses in on me, all vacuuming noise and heat.

“Thanks, I—”

“Hey, so I don’t know if this is totally clean, but,” a soft voice through the rushing shower, a soft towel’s being pressed at my side.

When I don’t respond a towel presses over my shoulders and my skin feels nice under the softness for a second, then starts seething again. The faucet shuts off and suddenly, there’s harsh silence.

I step out of the shower stall, face-to-face with Nilufer, one in the couple from Syria, who I'd run into the bathroom, looked at me once, told me I was covered in a bad rash and told me to the shower. "Wallah!... You are Elephant Man!" she'd said when we collided, and then asked was I alright. I'd just shaken my head and groaned, and she said no really, she's a med student and it looked bad, and in the heavy daze of my pain and hangover and general emotional rawness, I fell in when she took me in her arm and down to the shower stall.

"God, this is awful," I groan.

My skin had felt hot and tight when I woke up and I'd figured residual sunburn, some element of the sadistic supernatural + hard drugs, mostly the drugs—but when I looked down at my forearms, my neckline, chest, and entire back side of my body, and saw patches of rash laid out on my skin, and how the sun had come in while I slept and torn away at them, turning them red and angry, I realized that's why I woke up feeling precisely like body's been smushed through a funnel, sun-dried, and then stuffed back into my skin through the pores of my forehead.

"It's gonna work out..." Nilufer is a wellspring of medical and emotional care. "I mean it's like, you're good friends, you seem like you both like each other, so what's the problem?" she says, affecting cheer.

We look at each other, her thick eyelashes and deep brown eyes, which are slightly tilted down at the edges, soft and drooping, so that it looks like they're somehow lopsided, or like she's dozily peering up through glass. The rest of her is all rigid, talking fast about creams for this and that, telling me she's in a rush so, handle this on my own,

that it's probably the Turkish equivalent of poison ivy and had I maybe walked, or...rolled my entire body in underbrush recently? When I told her, Beats me, and gave her a look like, yeah Nilufer, I know, she'd looked back at me, her soft eyes. She's a person you can't not like—she glues to you, all energy then settling, trustworthy and solid, under all of the frilly trappings of friendliness and cheer, peering at you like she knows your soul before you do, but only has a minute for it for it before she whisks away, moving her hands towards the next thing. I trust her immediately, which is why I've been oversharing my lived-tragedies with her since.

“I’d wanted this to happen for so long and now I feel like a giant sleeve of salami,” I whine. The cold water that hits my neck is warmed by my skin once it gets to my calves which makes me feel better for a second, then I’m seething again.

“That’s very unfortunate. Really it’s sad. I’m sorry. But I’m trying to check out of the hostel. Can you help me with that?”

Soon enough, after I’ve found some clothes on and my other flip-flop, I go down the stairs and flop over to the office to check Nur out. She leaves, and I see her cross the lawn, and I’m just sitting there, shuffling the bills she just gave me in my hands, putzing around, and then I see how she’s stopped on the lawn, and Sami run out to join her across the grass. They’re having an argument. It’s when she turns away, crying, and he turns in the opposite direction and, looking so sad that his face seems blank, frozen, gaze stuck on ground, and he drags his feet across the lawn and walks up the stairs, while her hand on her face, that I get up suddenly. Like I said, her personality: like glue.

“Hey, Nur,” I say, panting, once I’ve caught up to her right at the edge of the lawn, where the thick trees start. “Are you good?”

She looks back at me, surprised, then straightens her back, lifting her head up from the ground. I see the sheen on her face from crying, and how she looks angry about the crying.

“Is fine.” Once fully straight, she waves her hand like, forget about it. She gives an efficient, graceful nod, and I see the slightest way her face slightly crumples, I imagine I see the built-up tears. And then all at once her eyes harden and her face gathers itself up, becoming so blank that the blankness becomes an expression itself.

“Okay...just checkin.”” I glance up at the sky then come out all at once with, “Look, you did me a solid this morning and I was way too much of a zombie to actually tell you thanks. Soo the slightly-less zombie is just...saying hey,” I give a cheerful wave of my hand. “But on the reals if it caused you to get in a fight with your BF—”

“Ah, no. That was in works long before you came in.”

“Oh, kay. Coolio.”

She pauses, considering my face with her now-hard eyes. “I have to leave here. I don’t know what he does,” the words dripping like oil.

“Oh, so you’re splitting...”

With a single motion of her eyes she answers the question. Yes.

“I’m sorry,” I say, my voice solid.

“I mean if he doesn’t want to be with me he doesn’t want to be with me.”

“Oh...that’s shitty I’m sorry. You deserve better than that.”

“Well I love him so,” she snaps.

I blink, thinking, Okay then. Not giving me a ton to work with here, Nur. God, my skin’s still scorched earth. Why am I awake right now. Anyway. “I feel like we need to sit down and have the whole love talk!” I say.

“Love is heartbreak too,” she says, and picks up her map again, turning to go. I look where she’s turning, towards the line of trees that grow thickly until they meet the shore, and a tall figure, is standing there down at the bay. Then he’s joined by another. Then they both sink away, back into the thick eucalyptus trees, again.

“Nilufer, town’s that’s way...?” I say, pointing in the opposite direction, to the road.

“Um..” she says, skeptically. “You don’t know? People are going every day. From right around the corner of this Palmiye place.”

We don’t say bye. She walks along the edge of the lawn until the little Palmiye peninsula hits water, and then she hits sand, towards the water, where a couple men, and one woman, are pacing around on the sand, gesturing. I can make out the shape of one of them loosely dragging behind them a deflated rubber something. Then she turns right, obscured by the cluster of trees. And then all of a sudden Geth’s walking up the shore, towards me, talking away on his cell-phone.

He comes to an emphatic halt, his phone still seeming to dangle from his ear, once he sees me on the lawn. “You look awful!”

“Word, Geth,” I say, mostly to myself and take it as the cue to sit out today’s shift and call myself a Self-care day.

I go inside, find the first-aid kit, grab an assortment of ointment tubes, and in the open-air hallway on my way out, I run into Onur.

“I’ve been looking for you,” he says, taking in my rash. “Uh, Geth said maybe you should take it easy today.” I say something along the lines of “aw,” and Onur continues. “He says, you know, it’s not really a good look for us... with possible guests.”

“Ah,” I clamp my mouth into a grim smile. “Well, tell him not to worry his pretty little heart over it huh. I’ll go get myself swallowed up in a manhole. My rash will take me over so it was like I was never here. I’ll slip away into the ether. Like dust.” I don’t tell Onur that I was planning on taking today off anyway, I guess I just like seeing people’s reactions.

Onur looks at me blankly. “Just don’t greet guests.”

We find Hailey, and Sami hands me a joint and cite its healing qualities, and says, Nice to formally meet you, fellow staff member. Onur is ringing the cow bell and saying, Yup, Sami’s the newest member of our working team. Sami is asking me if I want to accompany him to a dissociative state for-ev-er, and I say, Neverland! How ’bout it. I ask him if he wants to talk about Nur and he says, “My heart is useless and only good for moving blood around.” I nod along.

“Fuck, Nur, shit,” he says, sitting back in his chair. All I notice of his eyes now is the dark dart of them against his face, his face which seems almost gnarled by hurt—bunched up and drawn into this grimacing dull squint for good.

“Fuck this shit is right,” I agree, nodding.

The rest of the day gets blanketed under the cool swathe of a wet towel, skull-smogging bud, circular talk of wasn't it so funny, the messy seams of our lives, slathering myself in layer after layer of ointment, alternating beer and tequila, Self care for my raw self. By the time and everyone else has come out on the patio, I've sunk back in with the Palmiye crowd. Sami, when he looks up to say something dark from his beer or hookah, or from his low-voiced conversation with Onur, I realize his face seems gnarled, his eyes not the same ones that seemed sparkling, or like they were made of gold, as when he'd checked in with Nur a week ago.

Silas comes out, and a wave of dread comes over me when I see him. He's just as red and awful looking as I am.

"Look what we have here!" Erich starts, when he looks between Silas and I, perhaps noticing that, side-by-side, we look like two red blooms of one sweltering rash. Then everyone notices and gives us much shit. Silas and I grimace at each other, at our inflamed skin. I should have said something to him as I left, about how, no big deal, about how to go forward, how we can ease into talking about the murky water breached last night, how we can obviously just ease into the naked truth of it when doing so is less cringey and not such a...sore spot.

Around us people say the things about would we just get a room, and giving much shit, saying they're keeping tabs on us, and damn, we really dragged each other through the mud didn't we. Silas tells Erich to quit it. We avoid eye contact, which basically involves him avoiding eye contact with me while I casually dart my eyes over yonder.

Silas nudges me and holds his hand out, his knuckles clasped, and, my mind in full melodramatic mirage mode, thinking this is the chance to let it all out, I lean forward into his invisible microphone and say all sultry, “*Come here often?*”

“Uh,” he opens his fist. “You left your ‘panties.’”

I lift my head up. On his palm is not the trappings of a microphone but a dark twist of fabric slowly unraveling. I palm it, slide it into my pocket and say thanks.

We look at each other blankly. And suddenly I don’t see Silas. It’s like he’s looking at me but his eyes have gone mute, like he’s already drifted off. He’s all low-lids, his eyebrows sort of up, like he’s slightly skeptical and removed from everything in front of him. Me included. Then he surfaces, looking up, like he’s realizing I’m there. Like he’s surprised I’m there in front of him. Like I—the one that’s looking too hard, why do my eyes want to see so much—like I’m girl he’s fucking now.

I feel heat—or maybe cold, or I guess it’s just that emptiness, like someone’s taken a spoon to my insides and now they’re like the settling of a TV after it’s been shut off, little static bits dancing across then slowly going still, until my chest is swelling with the emptiness too. I affect laughter, which turns into real laughter, even though the look in his eye sticks in my head for a while, long after he’s looked away.

I turn away. It’s fine. It’s fine. But still, it aches to think about how I’d pictured this moment, our first time seeing one another after having smoothly transitioned into our life as Lovers. We’d be on the patio with the rest of the group, laughing, everyone at the same level of woozy no-bad-vibes chill as the day before, his and my legs pressed together, languidly as one, with the setting sun soaking everything up here that nice

orange, cold ones in our hands, recently bathed, and, just as the late-afternoon swept across the rooftop I'd have told a particularly fun story about someone else's—maybe Onur's—embarrassing moment from the night before, and Silas'd look at me, my hair embraced by Aegean breeze, and I'd look back, and we'd be smiling at each other but there'd be a flicker in our eyes that could smolder a small town down, and we'd feel all the stuff to do with love.

But for real. We'd have known we had each other, as lost as we are out here. That we weren't going anywhere. That we were enough.

People are streaming slowly onto the patio and saying funny things. The patio is open to everyone but employees usually hold it down, as guests are more tentative. Part of our job—arguably the biggest part—is to not just give people what they need in terms of working plumbing and flea-less sheets and extra toothpaste, but to give them what they need. Geth calls it, the human element. So we invite them on over to sit with us, to have a burger, to have a shot, to get signed up for the bar crawl we'll run through Bodrum later.

The guys call over some guests to our side of the patio, some girls who are cute in your basic sense and have the naive and frantic air of Americans studying abroad. I know it because I've seen it in myself.

"We can't!" They say. "We have to figure out our flight tomorrow."

"Oh, so you have real people things to do," says Nic. "Bummer."

"But maybe afterwards..." one of the Americans adds. Fifteen minutes later those girls are out here with the rest of us. In many ways it's a routine night, but the feeling in the air seems, just sorta more energized than usual.

Oh, and the second mood-defining factor is the fact that the owner Geth's shown up, and he doesn't show up often, and this fact made the whole night kind of exude adulthood, seal some sense of maturity around the usual chaos of our child's play: the arrival of Geth. This makes no sense because Geth is a 42 year old man-child, which is maybe an exaggeration, but for real I think he straddles the line between adolescent and real person, somehow effectively, possessing the essence of each state in a way that is baffling and results in a personality somewhat like a rare jewel. He's, to my understanding, a very successful lawyer—has businesses like Palmiye all over the eastern Mediterranean seaboard—but he also brings more to a party than any of us. I mean this literally and symbolically. He'd shuffle in anywhere (cause he has back problems), most always with a ginger beer in hand and say “give us a cuddle” by way of greeting. But he always had drugs on his person. Days when he came by early we'd be on session all day from thereon out, given we'd completed the chore portion of things. He had pills, he had acid, he had molly. Sometimes he had ketamine, and days he came by with that we obviously weren't gonna say no—I mean I did sometimes but—all which was dangerous because, and maybe this was just talk, but it was rumored once you got into the k-hole you might also not ever get out. Geth mostly told stories too; stories was what he was good at, which he always started off with “I have amnesia.”

“I have amnesia,” he says as he walks onto the patio today, and launches into the time he took a baseball bat to someone's knees during his days in a British gang. I mean really.

Then we're laughing about what our nicknames should be. Laughing—I find this is easy to do. By the time everyone is pooling cash for our drug hookup's drop-in, the sun starts seeping orange, the world has built up again. I've shaped my world, my sweet malleable world, up into something alright.

I spot an ice-cream bar in the fridge and think Word, dinner, and am extracting it as the group of violently friendly American girls staying here come out to the patio and begin doling out questions to those they meet. One gets punches Sami's shoulder and says, "You have puppy eyes, like him!"

He looks reasonably disturbed, but introduces himself as Sami. When they get to the part about how he's from Syria, she stops, says, "So, what's your story?"

He sighs out. Then his heavy eyes drift away and startle when they settle on me, crouched on the floor below him, shoulder-deep in the low-boy door. His hard look softens when we make eye contact, and dilutes down to just weariness, and after a moment of our exquisitely tense eye exchange, he turns back to the American and says, "I told you I'm Sami. Is that enough?" before excusing himself, and walking away.

The great ball of sun hits the wall of windows, almost blinding me. There's got to be a name for this minute of sunset, or a word for the exact type of light sunset desperately throws out while it falls, or maybe one for the exact angle of the sun where it sits just above the reach of skyline right now, a certain strain of light on the windows at this time, but on my eyes right now, the sun soaks my skin is syrup, so bright that my eyelids still feel its phantom weight, even when they're closed.

She was trying to teach me a lesson.

—“MOM!” I scream from the driver’s seat, waving frantically. I’d stalled out over the railroad crossing and the barriers are closing.

I’m crying now, my voice breaking, “Why did you do this to me?!”

Now, she doesn’t respond at all. She’s looking straight ahead through the windshield, calmly, almost smiling. The barrier between the train tracks and road is coming down, ding-ding-dinging.

“Calm yourself down. You had to learn somehow,” she seethes. She had stopped me outside the grocery store on the way home and told me I would learn to drive stick and I would drive home. The train’s horn is dragging through the background.

In one movement I reach my left hand backwards for the car door, fumble and find the handle and clunk, it opens and the car’s swallowed by outside noise—wind, the faraway sound of the train, rushes loudly into the car, filling the whole space with noise.

“I forgot this way had a crossing when I told you to take it, okay?,” she says slowly, carefully. I look up and the train is just clearing the corner. “I know how to drive a car. I know how to move around a goddamned clutch. I know how to keep a roof over my and your heads and I’m *trying* to teach you—just like I’ve taught you everything you know—and nothing sticks! You stalled out and just sat there, stinking in your failure. You didn’t even *try* to get us out of here!”

I’m already halfway out of the car—“Mom *I hate you*,” I can barely get out through the mess of crying, “Maybe you want to kill us but”—I get away from the car. The sound of the train horn blasts so loud it’s painful.

I get to the sidewalk and, behind me, I keep waiting for the crash.

And then there's a giant whoosh, the alive groan as the train goes by.

I look back and there she is, my mom in the front seat, sitting in the front seat with the same expression, not even looking at me. The hard black mass of the train moves by behind her, and then whiteness again. It clears the space. It hadn't even grazed the car.

Finally, she pulls up. Finally, we glare at each other, and then we look away, and I hear the muffled click of the locks, and I get in.

"Seatbelt," she says.

I reach for the belt, obediently, stewing. I pull it across my chest, fumble around. She's stopped the car—as she does—until I put it on. I click in the seatbelt and the car starts, an engine heaving up, rumbling awake, alive underfoot. It drowns out the sound of my silent unfastening. The belt slides across my stomach,

"Like I said. I know how to move around a goddamned clutch. I know how to drive a car. You think I don't know if we're in the train's path or not? I taught you everything you know and it's like, nothing."

The worst part is her expression. Calm, that trace of a smile. She was looking forward through the windshield at the line of cars, at the sun shining. Never at me. Not wanting anything from me.

"You're a sociopath," I sneer.

"Oh, roll your eyes at me, sure."

I realize now—that was the last exact moment domineering shell I'd felt so wholly that she was unbreakable. Like she was on her own track that couldn't be stopped. I could only swoop around, shirk away.

When we stop at the light, and my body's rocked forward—even though it's the smallest second—I feel sweet satisfaction. My silent, coward's spite, a liquid, turned solid.

I look up and see the trace of a smirk on her face.

She remained a difficult woman to live with, though. We fought for weeks during my last stint living at home. It was winter break, my sophomore year—before I'd just fucked off on campus with summer courses—and my practice of ignoring of her complaints about this and that was starting to waver. When she huffed and puffed I huffed and puffed back. When she told me to pick up my things strewn about like trash across the house if I wanted to keep living here for free, I walked out of the house and didn't come back until the next day. (She hadn't called.) She made a comment about my having seconds at dinner, because my “figure” was a “fixer-upper,” I told her I truly didn't give a shit about what she had to say. It got to a point where we couldn't really stand to be in the same room as the other. When I went to school upstate we talked briefly about how I should stay with dad—or just anywhere else, really—the next break, and then the subject came up more and more.

Everything, the same from day to day until it's not. I'm getting home from hockey practice to half-drunk coffee cups left around the house, doors not always locked, then, not always closed.

Reality arrived, peeked in, and now it's settling. It's ironic and painful, how quickly, because of that, I'm supposed to convert from bitterness to pity. I guilt myself for thinking that. I don't let myself say the words ‘bitterness’ or ‘pity.’ And I haven't had

friends over the house in years. I hadn't introduced a friend to Mom since I was fifteen. I couldn't. In college I don't bring her up. It's not embarrassment exactly. It's how tense, how complicated, how weighed down in hurt, to watch for the day, which day it would be, because it'd come, that she'd not know their names or their faces anymore. Home was where I went and steeped in the shapelessness of what was happening. It's just, who wants to hang out where a sad thing is taking form? When we could just go somewhere else. So, as all this is happening, I don't talk to anyone out loud about her, either. I think I have time.

Then it's Christmas a couple years ago—I did end up going home, reluctantly—and she's told me brusquely there are some symptoms, although she doesn't go into them—what I'll know later—getting home from a dinner party, closing the door behind her and standing in her big empty house, running over the same thought—did I keep repeating the same story to my friends? did they know? and the book she gets all the way to the last page of before realizing she'd read it already ten years before; the feeling some mornings like her brain's gone into a dream or has been ransacked overnight and stayed there and she is trying to go to work, to get up for work and go but first she must put it back together.

And then last year she is in the center of the living room, standing. Her taut shoulders had melted forward, like her body's a gown that had suddenly found itself without a hanger or a place to hang. I stand, watching her from the stairway. What's going on in that head of hers?

Later, I come back into the doorway and she's still there, as if she hadn't so much as breathed. Still and unarmed. She turns towards me and smiles, sheepishly, and all at once I know that I'm not her daughter anymore, not really, and she's no longer mom.

It felt like I was walking in on her changing or reading out loud all the sugary rotten secrets inside her soul. It's unsettling. But more than that, it was someone looking across a crowded room at you when you don't expect it—a stranger you just met, the person you ache for but don't have, a friend's girlfriend or boyfriend—and for a moment, after the twitch of the surprise, after the surge of repulsion, or still-just-surprise, after the lotus-eating and the vanity washes away and you've carved away from the scrim of bullshit around your head, you wonder what—or who—it is they're seeing. You wonder what they were looking for, and if whatever person they were looking for in you was aching still, too.

Something in me swells in my chest, settling there for a moment, then it hardens. This clay mass I hadn't formed until now. I call it anger and look at her like I don't know her. How easy it is to do, to stand there in the doorway and glance like I barely recognized her. To say, Just checking about dinner. How powerful I feel, like I have a harness in my hands, like I'm being so smart, so tactful, not to see. That anything, now, I give to her is a gift. The hard ball is dissolving, and what a relief, what a gift to me.

The ball in my chest is all hurt and fear and unnamable murk, too. It's the built-up years of knowing that, seeing her in the center of the room like that, and her now-sweet eyes, I want more than anything, I want to go to her, to hold her in my arms, but I know she would go taut again.

I put together dinner for the both of us, moving through a kitchen that's not my own, grabbing food out of the fridge, chopping garlic, opening a can of tomato sauce, clamping down hard.

We sit down at the table, forking pasta, I dab at a blue screen.

“You look nice,” she says. She keeps looking at me, a plaster smile on her face. Her voice has changed. It’s always been the one calling out my full name from across the house—tinny, impatient—so I could hear and come ‘to her beck and call,’ and now her new voice, warm, swelling up, all-body, honey pressing down then dissolving in the air between us.

The image—the sound—of the before-her is too fixed in my memory. We play pretend.

Throughout the next few days she wavers back and forth between her two selves. That night over the table, within seconds the voice of honey’s gone and she’s back to the way she always was, her critical eye, complaining about the cat’s shedding, wiping on lipstick, the water pressure in the faucets are dribbling too slowly or shooting out too fast. When she went on about these things, she was either worked up—pacing the room, her voice souring at the edges—or so displeased that it had put a pasty mask of an unmoving expression—weary detachment—over her face, even over her moving mouth. I had the strange feeling at looking at a mask whose eyes had already receded, at a face so empty of any expression that it’s become an expression itself.

I return to school and tell myself I’ll move back home. I tell myself I’m a daughter who is loyal and selfless and good, that she put a roof over my head and a...I

don't remember the rest of how that goes. It's as if I'm reading those words off the page of a book, anyway, repeating them until they're just sounds, but wedge inside still.

Because I want to be. I think about me. Which turns into, what about my life? My whole own life. I think about how she deserves this, and what I find on Buzzfeed about Karma about corroborates this. Karma's a B\*tch. 20 Times Karma Did God's Work.

I call up dad. I'd get out first—that's the most important thing, just getting out of here—and I'll then take the next step. Dad says he'd be happy to have me, that he'd pay for the ticket, get things squared away with mom.

"So you *still* don't know what exactly went down between you and Silas?" Hailey says when we're lugging carts of grey-looking burgers and cases of bottled water down the crowded aisles of the market downtown for Palmiye's weekly trip.

"Well," I say, almost cheerfully. "Let's just say, my memory of the night is like an arthouse montage. Or like, a choose-your-own-adventure. I have a version going in my head, but—"

"—You don't know if you had sex," she says, matter-of-fact.  
"I'm open to the interpretation is all. There were naked limbs and things everywhere. Only the moonlight to guide us. The deep murk of the twilight hours. The poisonous fronds of lust bowing down on the ground around us." She gives me a look.  
"Okay obviously I was black-slash-browned out, and I'm now freaking out on low-simmer, but I'm sure him and I will figure it out soon." I put a carton of milk in the basket.

"I can't believe you drink that stuff," Hailey says. "So bad for you."

“Hailey you did ketamine last night.”

She swats me on the shoulder, and we move onto other subjects, like how I’ve been kind of slacking on blogging because we really hunker down in Palmiye all day don’t we? so that’s kind of shoddy on the ’Grammability front; how when, yesterday, Hailey woke up and thought she was twenty-two, she was struck with the impermanence of it all, stopped Onur in the hall, patted her belly, said, Man, these eggs are numbered, the fleeting wonders of the female reproductive machine, huh?

“But then today I woke up and realized I’m only twenty! I have a whole three-hundred days!”

“That’s beautiful!”

Now she thinks Onur thinks she wants him, bad, and we discuss the pro’s and con’s of that playing out, then how I hooked up with another rando but he wanted to pretend to be a little boy, and I got a such gut reaction that I fled, “STAT! His thumb in his mouth!” and I think briefly about how I needed to dry-heave at even the idea of motherhood or whatever, and Hailey liked the guy she met downtown but he placed his hand on her neck the second they started kissing—

“Like in the clenching way, ye know?” she gestures with her hand the way someone would crush an esophagus.

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“Like in the clenching way, ye know?” she gestures with her hand the way someone would crush an esophagus.

We keep going through the aisles, throwing stuff in, not looking at prices because Geth has an account at this market and the woman up front basically honors it, just rings up the haul up front and writes it in a notebook, every time we come in. I’ve never formally introduced myself to the woman that runs the place, but she or her underlings, when we get up to the registers, seem to take our word for it that we’re here on Geth’s behalf, and seem know it’s without asking, maybe, who knows, by the cutoff shorts, or the seeming-like-we-just-woke-up, or the white-people-dreads, or the smell of sweat. The store has started putting lifejackets and inner tubes in it’s display window, and the aisle we walk down has so many orange vests stacked onto the shelf that their orange guts spill

out onto the floor. The handwritten signs laminated to that shelf is in Arabic. We tiptoe around.

We turn into another aisle, and I impulsively grab a pregnancy test off of the stuffed shelf and try to sneak it into the cart, Hailey swipes her hand and actually knocks the little pink box out of my hand and says—“You’re talking to Silas.”

We get back, I pledge to stay cool and she says she believes in me, and I round up Silas and we sit on the steps of one of the bungalow’s porches, which is breezy and by the water.

“So did we,” I do some stupid finger guns and clicking sound. “...Or?”

He laughs a little, looks down, says no.

“So you took off that ways,” he says, waving towards where the coast hooks around a bend, all jagged rock face and underbrush, then disappears from sight.

“Yes! I remember the intense pain of a rock.”

We start unraveling what happened, figuring out how we fooled around—I say, In what sense, and he says, Everything-but, and I really don’t remember anything? I was way off the deep end and so he obviously wouldn’t think about, you know, then. I obviously don’t mention his v-situation, even though I can’t help but wonder if that played into things, and he tells me how I was trying to get him to go down to the water the whole time anyway, dragging his hand.

“Yeah actually I remember that. We got yelled by a group of men didn’t we?”

“Yeah, they were this big burly Turkish types, they caught us when we made a pitstop at the shore and saw our half-zipped selves...”

“—zipless fuuuck,” I say in a voice.

“And they were like, this is a family beach, you two go against everything we stand for. We just stood there staring and unzipped, and it just made them worked up, they said they’d call the police and I think they actually did.”

“I wish I’d just let you take me,” he goes on, because it might have washed off the resin from the whatever rash-ripe brush we’d rubbed off against, but instead we’d headed back to Palmiye and gotten lost on the way. “I think I ran into a cow,” he says.

We sit with that, and I say, “Well, sorry. For dragging you like, through the mud. And into a cow. And for being a train wreck, in the bigger sense.”

“Ha, you’re fine, don’t be sorry, I was pretty messed up too, waay too crossfaded, just...conscious, at least.”

I think, Siick, nodding grimly and staring at the water like I want to be it. Onur’s cow bell’s going off in the background. I’m straining for how to play the familiar game of who’s-more-detached even though I lost centuries ago, so I give an ambivalent, “I’m glad we didn’t,” and try looking off broodingly detached at the cool blue water.

“Yeah,” he says, it...wouldn’t have been the right time,” and there’s something new in his voice, like frayed silk.

“Yeah?” I say. We look at each other in this, way. because I want to hear him say it, putting my hand out, thinking, You got this, Mily, and because I guess this is how the dance goes.

My hand's on his arm. His eyes flickering down for a small second. We sit there. Somewhere there's a bell rocked against the background, sinking and swelling. "You're not going back up are you?" I say, but I don't really say it as a question.

"Hm, are you?"

"No," I say, too quickly. I'm all water. Man, I can't keep up with this world of ours. I can slip away like that, brimming against whatever container of my self there is like water, or syrup, against finely-gritted sand. The wind chimes are dragging through the air and I wouldn't hear them I'm so far gone inside some other place, like my head's in my chest, being put through a sieve. I could be chewed-up and spit out like that. Less than that. Right now.

"Cool. I guess I don't have to."

"Yeah, stay," I say, reaching for him again, pulling him.

On the fuzzy periphery his hand's on my side. I move towards him, everything's far and close at the same damn time. How easy it is to press my mouth to his. Thank God. His head is so close that most of it's eclipsed, so what I see of him smiling is what I feel of me smiling, all body, my mouth doing the seeing part of it. I figure the taste of his mouth is salt water. Silas and I open up the tent and go inside, all the blueness of the light coming through the canopy, the blue nylon and the soft-packed earth underneath, and he's making comments about my face and my hair smells nice and this and that, and I'm saying, I can't believe this is happening, and his hand, on the lip of my shorts, how small in space or distance it is, the seam between everything in the outside world and what stays in, all fabric, just the gesture of a space, really, to keep us from falling apart—how

we kiss each other tentatively and then it's like we're trying to take in as much as we can— just say the word and we'd unfasten, almost whispering at first, then louder, the casing of my skin's dissolving, how the space between us still seems so flimsy, the turn of a wrist, the bend of a finger and, just like that, I'd be gone, or I'd wait, held taut, or turning back and forth, wires coming up under the walls, bristling, he could hold me on a threadbare string and I'd wait, let him, want him to, for a second without knowing when it ends, gathered up, right there, so that, he could make—even though he didn't have to, even though it could happen any other way, with anyone, without—me come undone, the ground disappear under me, at the flip of a switch—no, more than that, the in-between, time stretching then collapsing into space, and then over and over again, lead dissolving in your hand, we're desperate for someone to make us turn, a one good thing, and then the next, again because we kept looking for a line to hold us steady, for someone who'd make us wait then undo ourselves—he had all that wait to lift, with just one hand.

“Sexiest thing I've ever seen,” I say when Silas rips off his socks and they crumple against the tent wall—he rips off all his clothes immediately, like this is a drill—and he looks up, jerks his head up, his hair flicked out of his face, wide-eyed, like he's been caught, or like he's come across some streaming and sparkling thing when he totally didn't expect it, and then we both crumple, laughing.

That's how it goes, sex with him for the first time, like we're trying to crack a code but the stakes are low and it's pretty much win-win, the way two people laugh together, laughter that's all-body, soft and jangling at the same time, loping across a room, moving apart and coming together. Even though the laughing dissolves into traces

on our faces at times, even though we're fumbling and laughing at the fumbling, not understanding angles, suctioning together and sticking away, our skin with an eerie sheen in the blue light, losing balance, our breathing raspy and too loud, trying to catch a rhythm, we're just trying to feel good, does this feel good, how about now, and I say, anything you do feels good—until it, fuck, it feels good, and he's smiling, asking, like that, and I say yes, rocking, heavy, slowly, like good water pressure, moving, how goddamn close we are, I want to be brimming with him, for him to open me all the way up, I'm pressed in from all around, like each time is a surprise, faster, meeting him, pinning to his hips, his face changing—something moves across it like shock or repulsion or bugged-out pain, and then he tries to mask all of it, to straighten his face or make it hard, and he looks down at the two of us, slamming and slurring together and then, he looks at me and our eyes are made of the same thing—laughter and love, but wonder too, like we're two halves looking at this separate, sparkling thing we made, like we have this secret other world between us where we're laughing and shining and we both know it for once—and, still over me, his arms staked down to the ground, his face falls apart into a smile that's all-Silas, guileless, silly, unguarded, and I'm thinking about how alive he seems, how he's the most-alive, how absurdly close we are and how, huh, I could love him, I really could, like I could feel the press of the words tingling on my tongue, but then I can feel him smiling into my mouth and the thoughts stop, and I say, Silas, like it's being torn from my insides, and his face is wrenched apart, he's saying, Christ, and, then he gets all serious or nervous when he pulls out, like Op, what-do-we-do-now and I'm like yeah, let's maybe not, biff this, but we work it out, and lay back down, and we're all

breath, woozy, looking up at the blue screen over the sky, saying, what would us a year ago, or what about five, said about us now?

I don't remember the time of day or the light outside, just the exact color of cool blue—the tent seemed to glow like an aquarium from light it let in—of when I looked up and everything before me felt this good.

Palmiye this week:

I suspect Anna is a compulsive liar, and I have for a while, but it's a low-intensity compulsion which hasn't yet tipped the scales, so I haven't said anything. I.e., so far I've only seen her slip a suitcase lock from the storage room in her pocket then look me square in the eyes and tell me she bought it yesterday. I mostly really like hanging out with her, so I hope she keeps it under wraps. Maria is from the Romanian boonies and working here to support her family. She's an actual saint and calls everyone Babe and Honey girl, like hun-eh-geal, and takes the work way too seriously, like she cares. With Jasper from Australia, it's like he thinks he lives in a fairy tale; he'd quit his job and moved out here and wears harem pants and other flowy, floral things, and calls himself an interior designer, and he sort of *talks like this*, lovely, like more air is moving through his words than the rest of ours. I swear Domenic is a dog whisperer because Raki the happy dog follows him around with love in his eyes, Domenic, one in the never-ending line of Aussies who stop in on their two-year jaunts, sussin' it out over the globe with their curved syllables and chillness, Domenic, who's braided some strands of his silk black hair and clasped them with evil eye beads, and wears white pants and fedoras and who, despite the fedoras, we all have a painful crush on. Nic looks big and intimidating

from afar, and yes, he does have a really loud voice, but he has the soul of a sweet baby animal. He's also smart, in a, figures out Palmiye's accounting and online booking system way.

When I wake up this morning, probably more asleep then not, so I can't trust what I see, but, out of the corner of my eye this morning, from the rooftop, I see a pickup truck pull into the dirt road alongside Palmiye and at least five people get out and go into the trees behind Palmiye, where the property meets the water. The same cluster of trees Nur had walked into and left.

Tequila street's dark alley is throwing out dank purple light and deep rolls of music, with sweet sweat breathing in its corners, and in between there are people like one amoebic fist, coiling then lashing out at us again. We sink into them, then we parade around the street into its neon-sliced black stalls. Inside one, we lean over a table and laugh about how we can't stand on our own! "Come," say a man and a woman, who seem to work here, say as they make laps of the dark room. "Come," they say with silty accents, walking around with shot glasses attached to babbled plastic chains around their necks so that when a person pays five lira they can drink from the breast of the shot bearer.

"She left. She left me," Sami is saying like an incantation to our end of the bar. now wanting to talk Nur. At a certain hour every night the switch happens. Since Nur left, this has pretty much been his waking-hours m.o.

"She was everything to me, ya?" His words come out loosely and wet. "She wasn't supposed to go without me."

“Yeah,” I say, patting his arm. “You know what they say...” I say, but I don’t know what they say.

Sami glowers down at the tabletop, then looks around at the dim room, the neon light that’s thrown out every once in a while. “I just need some time! Live my life to the maximum, you know?”

“My girlfriend!” he moans. He lifts his shot glass, somberly, and we follow suit, and then he gulps it back with a face that’s despondent and brave and blank all at once, and so we make that face too.

“He was my brother!” Silas is shaking his head. “My brother told me to destroy my cigarettes the day he died,” Silas says down to the wooden table. “So I did, and I turned around and smoked a pack a day since.” Sami and Domina pat him.

“He died of *lung cancer*, though,” Silas says. “What am I *doing*? I’m giving up smoking today. Right now!”

“My girlfriend,” Sami says slowly.

“Are you guys in love?” a random says.

“Very much.”

“My arm!” Hailey is saying. “My arm!” because it’s gotten stuck in the barmaid’s tinselly-gold necklace on the tail-end of her raki shot, and as she’s extracting the thing, Sami is saying, “very much, we are very much in love,” and he’s saying the name of said-beloved, whose name is a sound I can’t quite say but sounds like the soft underpinnings of a song, like a lullaby, and someone’s saying “What name? Mur? Prrr?” and he’s saying “No, her name is Nur.”

My Mom, Mom. I don't say it out loud. She is also a low hum about past things, a loop threading around and around then sounding out again: it will come, and it will go too, and the other sounds drown it out in interim, enough to suffice for a little while.

Silas nuzzles into my shoulder. I can hear him thinking about his brother, his brother, hooked up to a breathing machine, whose only last thought was for Silas to take care of himself, who thinks he's all slag, to know better and forsake all of it, of what part of him really is reaching away from his brother and for the pack of Camels each day.

It's moments like these I feel we're all, here at Palmiye, calling out for our lost things, the most together, like we are one animal lurching and trying so badly to walk in loops around its pen. It's also the loneliest feeling. It's like dissolving from my own skin, like knowing my pulse is weakening away before I feel it.

We're all royally sluiced by the time we get to the beach. Bodies and pink and purple lights press against me. Once the bouncers stamp our hands, we're corralled into a giant pen, where the sea of people we press into doesn't make way—just grinds against us—and doesn't end. Club Orange is on the sand but I don't feel sand. We are surfing on a wave that holds only ourselves. We sway this way and that, a person I don't know falls against me and leaves his sweat, but then the sensation is mixed with everything else. We are surfing on a wave that holds only ourselves.

We go through the crowd and they part for us, or put out their elbows, and we make it to the bar and have various shots and, our throats stung with raki, we then turn around and press through the elbows again, lugging back leaking drinks in our hands, sloshing everywhere. We find a spot we can all fit in and dance in a circle, stretching out.

Hailey puts her arms out, taking in Onur, and Sami spins and spins in the middle and he looks like he's truly found elation. He loses balance, though, and his face, and the feeling, crumple.

The music gets louder, and I sink into it. It tingles and aches. The machine in the sand is churning up and commanding us left and right. I jump in the air trying to get it out. The dark sound is in my guts, and I coil into the no-name feeling. The bass again.

Hailey and I do little numbers across from each other, we put our hands up and bop around and swing our hips to the bass thump and I say hey! or, yeah! when the song cues us to. We break into Joy. The bass again.