

“why are we pulled over”

You asked me.

“We’re going home.”

“okay”

We walked together through the snow-riddled streets, my hand holding you tight.

“i’m cold”

You whined; you were always cold.

“That’s ok.”

The cold was welcoming, soporific, and yet I couldn't help but bask in the momentary warmth provided by the dull sun. Each crunch of my feet against the bitter ground was like a clock ticking away, marking each second, minute, hour, day.

“where are we going”

Your voice was thin and it echoed through my head, a whispered tone I didn't recognize. You’d never sounded like that, you were always so full of life.

“Home.”

“but home isn’t cold”

“We’re going home.”

You were slipping away. My fingertips burned, felt as if I were running my hands under hot water, but they held your shirt. You stopped speaking, truly convincing me that I was alone. Yet I held a deadweight. Maybe you didn’t mind that I was dragging you, maybe you were watching the dense scenery go by, maybe you were distracted by the ambience.

“Remember that time we were at the lake? That one with the boulder by the shore.”

You were still silent.

“We laid together, watching the stars, your head on my chest... You told me you loved the sound of my heartbeat. I remember laughing it off like it was some silly joke.”

I looked down at you, your skin a beautiful shade of alabaster. If it weren’t for the clothes you wore, you would’ve looked just like the snow.

“But look at us now.”

My feet were numb. These trees—were they the same trees? I clung to you, onward to no real destination.

“where are we going”

You asked me again.

“I already told you, we’re going home.”

The weight of your body hit suddenly, and my muscles strained, struggling to move forward. The branches reached out above me, a sky of shattered glass.

“Don’t you listen?”

The silence was deafening, a cacophony of nothingness. The birds’ songs died out. I wheezed, the frigid air burning my lungs. A fading equanimity.

“You know, you—”

My words were cut short, plummeting face-first into the snow-covered asphalt, stunned. You tumbled down with me. I didn’t realize I was out until I was awake. Immediately, I felt alarmed, shooting up, finding your body. Your arms outstretched, marcid flesh exposed to the world I wish to hide you from. If it weren’t for the cold, you’d be stiff as a board.

“What is your problem? You’re making this so difficult for me.”

" i don't mean to"

It was reassuring, hearing you speak to me once more, but the joy was short-lived. I wriggled around, lying on my back, keeping my grip on you. It was beautiful, this gray and white painted landscape. I wanted to lie there forever, to watch the small flakes flutter down, to watch them land on your blurry eyes.

“We need to leave. I can’t stay here anymore. I’ve got work, you know that.”

It was cold. I didn’t like it here. I staggered back up, standing tall, proud of something I couldn’t quite understand. I leaned down, looking at your face. You were like a dove, something peaceful, pure, and unbroken. Grabbing the back of your shirt, I continued forward.

“Remember that fight? At the same lake. Truly, I don’t even know how it started. I think it was about dishes, something trivial. Oh, and I remember you telling me that I was being ‘distant,’ and that I was ‘giving you the silent treatment.’ What was that all about?”

I wrenched your shirt, pulling you closer to my legs. The air felt brittle and tight, suffocating me slowly.

“You were always so insistent on getting what you wanted, making everything so much more of a problem than it should’ve been.”

I tugged on your shirt again.

“But in the end, I’d always end up crying because we would just keep screaming. over and over. It’s like we can’t do anything anymore without it ending in disaster. ”

I tugged on your shirt again.

“Why didn’t you just listen? Why couldn’t you ever just listen to me?”

You were a parasite slowly draining the life from me.

“Get up!”

I tugged on your shirt again.

“Why won’t you listen to me!”

I tugged on your shirt again.

“Goddamnit! I loved you! I loved you so much, but you just keep taking and taking and now there’s nothing left.”

Your shirt tore, fabric screaming away from itself. Your skin grated against the asphalt, leaving behind a faint trail of red. Like a field of poppies, coquelicot petals decorating the snow. The wind picked up once again, white flakes blowing into my eyes, blinding me. By then, my fingers were numb, trembling little things. Each breath I took dissipated into the thin air. The sun was slowly setting, although the time was a distant thought, a thing of the past.

“i’m sorry”

“You’re sorry? Seriously?”

I stopped and looked down at you.

“Why are you telling me this now? Why couldn’t you have said that when I needed you to?”

“i’m sorry”

I desperately wanted to hear you say something comforting. Sorry wasn’t comforting. You were starting to sound like me. Frail and pathetic, to be thrown out and destroyed. Your voice felt like a distant memory, something on the tip of the tongue that I couldn’t quite taste.

“Okay.”

The cold rattled me to the bone. I shook like a wet dog. The trees and birds watched me and listened to every beat of my heart. My skin prickled, but it wasn’t from the cold; it felt as if something was going to jump out at me any second. I quickened my pace. I didn’t care how mangled your back was, or how weak I’d become. I felt like a soldier, marching to his doom, or maybe I was the wife, weeping. Perhaps I was both. I coughed. Breathing was more of a

challenge than moving you. The motherly grace of the wind blew across my skin, a sharp caress. The snow slowly erased more of the world, it was my own now. Just a blank canvas.

“where are we going”

You asked me again. I wish I knew.

“Wherever this road takes us.”

It didn’t have to be like this, it didn’t have to be this way, and yet, it is. Here we are, two dilapidated souls, searching for solace.

“but where”

I breathed.

“we aren’t going home, are we”

I continued to haul your sluggish body, closing my eyes to try and clear my mind, but it didn’t seem to be working.

“are we”

“God, I am tired.”

I whined; I was always tired.

“we can rest when we’re home”

I believed those words came from my mouth, that I was the one who said it. But, it was your voice that I heard.

“Oh, dear.”

I let you go, your head making a sick sputtering as it hit the road.

“You must be freezing down there.”

I wasn’t smiling, didn’t, not once this day. Since I woke up, I felt like a husk. The cicada shed its old skin. Seeing you in the morning didn’t faze me. I wasn’t sad. Should I have been sad? Was that what I was supposed to feel? I didn’t feel anything, I don’t feel anything.

“It’s okay, though.”

Was it? Was it? Was I even moving? Was time even moving? I looked to the sky, gray. No clouds anywhere, just a monotone gradient. The sun was slowly fading, leaving me, escaping. Abandoning me. You would never abandon me, I knew that. But, why was I so scared you would? Where would you be if you left, or if I did? Not here. We could be down different roads, separate roads. Perhaps this was my road. My heart, mind, and soul. Broken, lost, and forgotten. No room for comfort. I lifted you from beneath your arms and pulled your body up to mine. Cradling you, I continued moving.

“where are we going”

You asked me. Hasn't this already happened? You've said that before. We've said all of this before. Was it your voice I was even hearing? It wasn't. You sound just like me. Was it you? Was it really you? It was, it was always you. I had to turn and look, winter descending upon your body. Everything was twisted, nothing made sense anymore.

"We're going home."

Have I gone mad? I looked back at you, your beauty turning worrisome. Why are you so pale? Are you ill? I was drifting off the road, losing track of my footing. I stepped on loose ground and tumbled down into a ditch. Your weight followed, crushing the air from my lungs. I writhed as I struggled to push your body off of me. You toppled over, your spine slamming against the rough rocks. I rose once more, knees trembling. My hands and knees bled, but I couldn't feel it. It didn't matter to me. I am fresh and alive. I looked down at your body, you looked asleep, but...

"Will you stop looking at me like that?"

Your mouth and eyes were wide open, judging me. I felt a sickening feeling in the pit of my stomach. Why were you looking at me like that? Bile rose to my throat. I glanced around at my surroundings, the ditch felt like it was trapping me, and the slope rising back to the road was a wall. You're not supposed to look like that, are you? I was hyperventilating. The air entering and leaving my lungs suffocated me.

"STOP IT!"

My voice cracked as I screamed to no one in particular. I pursed my lips together, doing my best to keep them from trembling. It was no use. I fell apart, weeping like a child. The weight of my body forced my knees to buckle, throwing me to the ground. I choked up a sob, gagging over your quiet body. I wiped my snot and tears across my cheek, grabbing your shirt and smothering my face into it. I cried until my eyes were sore, until my body wouldn't let me anymore. I watched you as the moon rose, unsure of what to do next. Home was the obvious answer, but I wasn't ready.

"I'm sorry..."

You were silent.

"I'm sorry for everything—it's my fault we're here, I shouldn't have locked you out."

Much like your own, tears clouded my vision, and my throat

tightened. I cleared my throat, trying to speak again, but I could only whimper as my face scrunched up. I've gotten everything I wanted. I have you, so why does it hurt so badly?

"Please, say something..."

The screams of silence echoed through my head. I tried to think of your voice and what you would say to me. You'd be holding me, telling me everything was ok. Right? I can't remember your voice, at all. It's like none of this ever happened. The lake, the fight, this road, everything. Like you'd never come into my life. Who have we even become? Where have we been going with this? I raised my head to look at your face, wiping my own.

"It's like a bad dream..."

I reached out across your body, holding your hand.

"If I could just wake up, then everything would be ok."

Your fingers fought against my hand as I laced them between mine. Like ice. I held you close, cradling you as I did in the past, hanging onto whatever life was left in you. Everything wasn't ok, though. Our relationship was doomed from the start. We were doomed from the start. We met at a support group. Your parents pressured you, and the state forced me. Court mandated. I was charged with a minor assault, and deemed 'unstable.' An impulsive, rage-riddled monster. It was a punishment for being different. I felt like such a pariah until you came to speak to me. You were sweet and we talked the whole session. About your depression and my instability. I felt normal. But that was only temporary.

"I think we should just go home. The past is the past, it doesn't matter now."

I let go of your hand, hauling you back up under your arms. Instead of returning to the road, I made my way into the woods, paying no mind to the branches and dead plants brushing against us. I'm glad you stopped speaking to me. I'm glad I am alone. Dragging you out here was for the better. There was no way I could've just called your parents or the police. No one needed to know.

"I think things were meant to be this way. You had been suffering for too long..."

From the day you were born, to this very morning, you have been suffering. I wondered if you were even alive, to begin with. Had your suffering just been a curse of being born? You weren't

supposed to be born, you told me. Your mother had to have an emergency c-section because you were having issues. I never liked your mother. You invited me to have dinner with your family one time. Excluding your father. The first thing she said to me was that I was “more trouble than I was worth,” and then “You came out blue” during dinner. Walking with you now, cold and uncomfortable, it’s hard to make sense of who I am holding, if there is a who. It’s you, yes, but it isn’t you. *You* is a difficult concept. You’re just a body now. Nothing more than a body. I came to a sudden stop, taking a deep breath of the frigid air. I let go of the body, watching it fall against the ground. It doesn’t matter where I am going anymore. I don’t think it ever did. I clawed at the ground, shoveling away snow and decaying plants, forcing dirt under my nails, trying to dig. I should’ve taken a shovel with me. I dragged the body by its hair, nestling it into the small snow clearing. I knelt. Sometimes I wish you had never met me. But that doesn’t matter anymore. I am free of our burdens now—no more suffering.

“Look, my love, we’re home now. You can rest.”

I caressed its cheek with burning hands and trembling arms. Leaning over the body’s immaculately ruined face, I pressed a kiss on its forehead. I am selfish, I know that. Whelved beneath handfuls of dirt, leaves, and snow lay the body. Beneath a tree. In the woods. Along a road I do not know. In a place I’ll soon forget.