

hazy

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when the door opens, we hear a voice. we don't know yet who it belongs to. this is good; we are setting up tension and the promise of release. I read this dream like a story, where every word is a question and every object a symbol. I think about me and him. what are we after all this time together? where do I end and where does he begin?

I have loved one man forever.

I have been one man forever.

our story is a dream.

when he turns to me I look away. our eyes clash like mirrors, the brightest objects in the room. his gaze feels like being caught, or being held. there is a draft against our backs. sometimes the soft touch is the scariest. I think he might have said something so I suck in a sharp breath in agreement. we often communicate in this way. I wonder if he heard the voice too. we take a few soft steps forward.

he turns to me again, curved like a question. he narrows his eyes so they look empty. he says what and I say yeah. the voice speaks again

and I can't make out the words. he asks what language was that and I say how should I know. he says I would know these kinds of things. I say not all speech is language and not all language is spoken. as it happens the two of us do most of our speaking without words.

some nights he holds me for hours without a word, and I feel his eyes burrow into the back of me. that one round promontory bone that sticks out at the base of my neck. he wants to touch it but doesn't. i feel him scope me out, stroke me with his gaze. neither of us falls asleep and neither of us gets hard. he wraps his arms around me in the dark, awkwardly, comfortably, for what feels like forever. sometimes I get up for a glass of water without saying where I am going and he says get me one too. being with him is as uncanny and essential as being myself.

we are in a derelict hospital on the outskirts of bandon town, by the way. at least that's what it looks like in the hazy, in-between space where dreams happen. it's close to home but foreign; I've never been inside. some of my family members might have died there. the light is cold with history and implication.

the next time the voice speaks, it's less of a sound and more of a picture. it sounds like the japanese character for cut. I always liked that one because it feels so spatial and final. I whisper its sound, *setsu*, under my breath. is that what it said? he pries, desperate and accusatory. what does that mean, he says. I say I don't know.

I like to pretend I know nothing. denial is a good place to be when you don't want to be anywhere. but wherever you are is always second best. I am picturing all the characters that make the sound *setsu* and the words they create. *connection, bittersweet, season, joint, closeness, theory*. there is no relation between these words, only association. my language

is made up of synonyms that can never meet each other. this is where I exist, floating aimlessly among the fruitless and intangible things I know. I don't know who I'd be if I'd never met him.

I am walking behind him up the stairs. maybe five seconds have passed, but I don't know how time works in dreams. I don't question where we are going or whether he knows. our story is developing satisfyingly. the relationship between us, the protagonists, is intimate enough to allow for some playful suspicion. he is solid and upright and I surround him like water. I call his integrity into question. he is my rock, my object.

I have known him since we were boys, a lifetime ago, in a dream, in a story. we met on what was probably a spring day, maybe on the gaa pitch behind our primary school. I picture myself making a daisy chain. he comes up and talks to me as if we're already friends. we are kids and no one is a stranger. we have never made a decision for ourselves. he asks for one flower and eats it promptly, giggling. I like him. this is the meeting of two fated souls; the archetypal boy lovers, never apart, never together. the daisy chain was a nice touch of symbolism.

there is a day some years or weeks later when we go swimming in the river together. when we are both stripping, I dare to glance over at him. I don't know what I'm looking for but I see it. he notices, turns around, and for an eternal instant, we are face to face, naked, taking each other in. our narrative is illuminated. it all makes sense now. when he slides into the water, before he resurfaces seconds later, blinking rolling river droplets from his eyelashes, and drifting in the idle current—is he picturing me? I hear the river's chime on his tongue still today. he gives my being breath, my inspiration. he is a dream, a story.

at the top of the stairs he looks back at me. a door stands ajar. who

knows what will happen now. we sense the climax is fast approaching. I am about to say something. something definitive and meaningful. not just sounds, but language. not just speech, but an event. the turning of the final page in our story. something that summarises and defines all the things which I have said and not said in my feeble life devoted to this person. to speak is to be and I open my mouth and I am about to say it but there is nothing. a hollow sound hangs in mid-air. we continue down a corridor.

we enter the room, where a figure sits hunched over on a bed in a far corner. we now understand that this is where the voice was coming from. we feel uneasy at this development. the figure is making helpless and unintelligible wails, somehow more potent in their meaninglessness. we look at each other, lost but in fearful understanding. the voice and its owner are too fragile to be recognised as male or female. but it's him. as we approach I am sure of it. when I see his face it's like seeing my own death. he looks right through me as if I'm not there. it melts my core. I am no longer substance. he turns to him, the other him, the real one. mine, or rather his. their eyes connect and take root. their words spill over across their gaze.

in the morning, the coffee is ready just before I get up. he is wearing my dressing gown. he knew I wanted scrambled eggs, slightly underdone, with plenty of butter and black pepper. he knows everything there is to know about me. we stopped saying meaningful things years ago. we speak like rivers becoming the sea; aged, contemplative, barely there. he's reading the novel I gave him the other day. I'm reading the air. our narrative explodes, then collapses in on itself. I am part of him until I am not.

what do you like about me? I ask him. I don't know what I'm saying

but I go ahead anyway. this is why horses need blinkers. he turns to me, the two cups of coffee quivering in his hand. he does not look startled. I see his left testicle and tip of his penis between the folds of the black silk dressing gown and it does not shock me. he considers my question earnestly for a few seconds. his sincerity is charmingly loveable. you're kind and caring and loyal, he says. you're genuine and real. you're beautiful like in a classical sense. whatever it is that makes humans did a good job on you. I chuckle and roll my eyes, which he calmly ignores. he continues, not just beautiful outside but inside too. here we go again. he's never been afraid of cliché. his story had been written a million times while I'm still searching for the words to write mine.

my silence folds over into his. he hears my hesitation like electricity or a fly in the next room. I don't know what I want to say anymore but I need to get it out. if it doesn't leave my body now it will live there forever, in the microscopic ridges of my skin, an itch I can never scratch. the wave welling up inside me is too enormous to translate into tears. my eyes are as still as lakes at midnight. the poignant and aching conclusion is here. it leaves the reader with the saddest grain of salt on their tongue. they will puzzle over this feeling in its aftermath. I'll miss you, I say. I'll miss you too, he says back. I don't think he knows what I mean but I leave it that way.

we will always be together.

we will always be alone.

there is so much left unsaid.