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3 oz.

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3 oz.

Lane Sohn

"You miserable fucking bitch."

Great. Like I was the bad guy. Like everyone didn't know already, hadn't known for years and years, since those two towers fell and burned, that you can't bring water bottles onto planes. *Sir, I had said over and over, sir, please, I even said please for Christ's sake, you can't bring water past this point, you have to either drink it or dump it out, sir I'm sorry but those are the rules.*

He looked at me with this fire in his eyes that you only got when you started hating three bitches ago. It screamed cunt. Great. One of those. Sometimes you got those guys who thought they could be funny, *hey lady, c'mon it's just water, can't you let me pass this once? what am i gonna do with a bottle of evian, c'mon lady.* And it made me really wonder, when would the answer ever be yes? Why you, sir number one thousand and twenty three that I've seen exit the country today? Why you, when the pregnant lady with the glowing face and the all-pink Nikes is given a firm *no*? Not even the acne-pocked, black hoodie wearing seventeen year old with the sad smile flying across the Pacific to see his dad's new family is let go.

My paunchy stomach that stuck to the navy blue polyester of my pants, the scraggly hair that always grew right under my chin even after I dug at it until I drew blood, my bright, hazel eyes with the

long lashes that brushed my cheeks, what made it seem like I controlled anything?

So, he said it, he called it like he saw it, here I am, a miserable fucking bitch. And there was always this bullshit, *I was so numb, I didn't even feel the pain anymore.* When a man who wore jeans with clean hems and had white, Chiclet teeth felt the need to remind me of the monotony of my days, the severity of my pulled back hair, the hollowness of my gaze, it bit my heart with canines: poised to kill.

It started to get really bad when I moved to the International gates. With Domestic, you knew what you got. Real wholesome families with two, little kids and someone was always seeing their in-laws, sweatpants on all sorts of bodies, off-brand Uggs, and Midwestern smiles. And then you got to International and it was depressing as hell. It started when I noticed the seat numbers. Snot-nosed brats who never learned how to make eye contact wore six hundred dollar sunglasses through security and always flew first class. Their baby-bird always stiffened if we touched skin while I handed back their passports. I wanted to tell them *don't worry baby, what i got isn't for you, i promise.* Little, old ladies hobbling back to their home countries one last time bared toothless grins as they stuffed themselves into the back row of their thirteen hour flights. *oh, it's been so long* their words ground through

"When would the answer ever be yes?"

accents, half-pathetic, half-beautiful.

I made it worse. I gave up my Slims and starting picking up Vogues here and there and could really put a number on just about anything. Goyard totes (easy \$1,300 with tax, \$1,150 duty-free) slammed onto dirty floors in front of ladies slipping off their weekend Lanvin's (\$580 no embellishment, \$650 calfskin). Bare, porcelain feet on floors sullied by soles of shoes tracking in shit, so much shit, chewed gum, urine-soaked cement, smoldering tobacco tasting of cold-sore lips.

I shake my head at the garbage-disposal memory, at the man with his fire eyes, its metal teeth churning at my rotten brain, making a pink, gooey smoothie that sloshes within the confines of my thick skull. Here comes a couple. I have to look down so that my eyes don't drop out of their sockets.

They wear the same outfit. Matching velvet, black-and-white, herringbone pants, tapered down to his stocky, male ankles and hers fitted, smooth and tight. They kneel to untie the bright yellow laces of burgundy oxfords. Even their socks match, grey argyle. They wear heavy, navy blue wool sweaters, crew and v-neck.

They are young, in the early part of their late twenties. I see in the dull sheen of their beautiful eyes that they aren't bound for marriage. It will peter out, the comfortability of the sustained, low flickering that is their relationship. She stares with a hard look at the way he steps on the back of his heels to take off his shoes, leaving scuffs. He rolls his eyes at the way she removes her laptop with her thumb and forefinger. They are two candles burning in a pitch black room.

I see a young girl, about 12 or so, and her arms squeeze through the sleeves of her t-shirt. These arms, her arms, balloon from the hem, the skin is pulled taut and looks like stiff elastic. Arms that you could prick with a needle, unsure if she would deflate, filled to the brim with hot air, or break under a cement-hardness just below her stretched skin. Her face is two moons, full and bright with a crescent of skin hanging just below her chin and jaw. She waddles through security and trailing behind is her out-of-breath mother.

I've seen mothers like this before. She smiles too wide for the disappointment she buries under obsessive PTA hours. Her hair is neat, the ends thick and soft. Her gait is eleven years of power-walking with other mothers whose sons have names like Bradley and Matthew and date Karen's and Sofia's. They will never date her daughter. This mother wears tasteful lipstick, expensive, straight-legged jeans, and muted jewelry. Her daughter's shirt declares in bold, pink, glittery letters across her chest "Sweet & Sassy," clinging against hills of the same hardness that makes up her arms.

The cruelty of it snuck up on you. For the child, obvious. Years, not of invisibility, but unfortunate, glaring attention. Piercing eyes that accused, without pause, a girl not yet in her teens. The mother. She grits her teeth through unconditional love and lies in her husband's arms at night wondering, if she hadn't laughed in Becky Hampton's face for asking to sit with her at lunch in 1988, would her daughter fit under her embrace? Other mothers spoke with tones that said *good for you* and eyes that panicked *thank god it's not me*. She was

the “best mother ever”, superwoman, she had to be, her daughter was 50 pounds overweight.

I knew I wouldn't make a ton of money. I just didn't have the face for it. Before I even graduated high school, the best I could hope for was a neat, two-bedroom apartment, my kids not having to share beds, and buying Kraft, not generic. It didn't bother me much, some people just didn't make a ton of money. My parents didn't, my grandparents didn't, my cousin Lucy, my aunt and uncle in Florida, none of them were rolling in it, but we all lived. And if I wouldn't have money, I could at least see the world. Wear blue skirts that I ironed before every flight and click-clack through airport security with the ease of having done it a million times.

My mother, hardened by years of making Frito, casserole dinners and the realization she had only lived for others, never said much to me. In my memory, she is a back, always turned away at the sink, words floating from a mouth I cannot see.

My father has a great doughy nose, tiny craters scattered across its terrain. His parental light shined brightest for his middle child, his second daughter. He would bring his daughters flowers from the garden three blocks from his work, leaving the most-bloomed on my pillow. My sisters were never jealous.

When his mother passed, he chose me as his companion, only able to afford one. Given reason by my approaching birthday and the implausibility of my

mother ever leaving the confines of our flower-boxed home, I wore my neatest collared shirt and boarded the plane to Michigan.

We sat down next to each other, sinking into the seats and clutching the

armrests. My father looked at me and smiled, sharing knowledge that I was the one he wanted at his side. We remained in silence until the airplane taxiing down the runway jolted us.

“You scared?”

“No, Dad, just excited.”

“Me too.”

“Thanks for bringing me. I really appreciate it.”

“Oh. Oh. Isn't this wonderful? When you're up in the sky, nothing can stop you. Absolutely nothing. How incredible is it? The power of our will and minds, and now we have invisible wings. All men can fly now. Sweetie, don't ever, ever forget to appreciate the simple joys we take for granted. There isn't any pride in that. Normal doesn't mean it isn't amazing every single time.”

At the time, I had just nodded, wide-eyed with hope. And I guess that's where it all began, but why think about beginning when it's all ending now? My face, the one that said I wouldn't go to college, was too dumb and fat to serve paying people comfort, thousands of feet in the air. I was bovine but not in the smells-of-clean-grass, dewy way.

Here I am, checking passports. And the fucking worst thing to happen to these people: throwing away \$2 plastic. Days ruined over formality en route to see the whole fucking world.

I lost my virginity to a boy who only ever smelled like oil and peach-flavored tobacco. He leaned in next to my ear *my name is* and I could never meet his eyes. He took me into the backseat of his father's car and I closed my eyes and lips shut. I said *thank you* when he was done and ran the ten blocks home.

Here comes a man with eyes that

droop at the outer corners. His eyes shift left-to-right and he's muttering heat under his breath, lips undulating with fervor. I try to call over another officer, a red flag if I ever saw one, and before I can turn my head and call over to Stan, the man stands in front of me and I'm staring down a barrel glimpsing the end of my life.

"Hello, sir."

"Shut the fuck up," and I hoped for a shout, a red-hot explosion of sound, but it's just a slate-blue whisper.

Everyone around has already screamed and crouched down close to the floor.

I read somewhere once, when faced with a gunman, to tell them details of your life and maybe that sympathy, the humanity you present, softens the potential murderer into finding a mute victim.

The man smells of peach-flavored tobacco and I smile at my

youth, my bright childhood of crimson blooms and warm, paternal laughs. I stare into a mirror of flickering fluorescent-lighted hatred, of lifetime middle-school insecurity that hooked itself into my throat and heart.

Pursuit of good floats somewhere in the mush. It's a concerto, it's the only live musical performance I've ever seen, it's Beethoven's 5th played on the strings of music school dropouts, notes floating through the air, sounds given to emotion, eyes closed, warmth

enveloping you through the only real feeling you've ever experienced, high and low, dread and longing all through strings and bows and keys. In music, there is a notation for pause. Silence and sound. Sound and silence. I can't hate him. My father's yellowing teeth come clear into focus and takes up my sight.

I close my eyes and wait.

