

# Ignore Tenderness

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Based on a short story by Camille Moore

OVER BLACK

*"Grief is a callous. A thick, yellow skin to ignore the wound underneath until it's no longer tenderness -- you will know you have grieved when you begin, again, to feel." - Mallorie Moce.*

Words fade away until we're left with:

*ignore tenderness*

EXT. CAFE - MORNING

Busy city street outside a cafe.

NARRATOR (20s) sits at a table outside the cafe, watching the traffic. A half-drunk cup of coffee is on the table. Narrator picks fingers.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

It was in the stillness that I thought of him, picking at my fingers. As if I was agitated, late for something -- I circled and scrolled through memories and dreams, playing the same thoughts so many times, I bored myself to tears. Where the hell was Alice?

INT. INTERVIEW TABLE

Alice sits in a black void. She looks into the camera.

ALICE

Once I'm there, I'm yours for the whole day.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

That was how she justified it.

Narrator stands in front of Alice.

NARRATOR

(to Alice)

I don't want your whole day! Nor do I want to wait for a fucking hour!

EXT. CAFE - CONT'D

NARRATOR (V.O.)

But I would, and did, and Alice knew it. I wondered how much of it was conscious -- I could tell that she enjoyed my annoyance, as if it were exciting to rush in a flurry and have to win me over. Maybe she was afraid that a regular conversation would be boring. No, that seemed wrong, I doubted it was that calculated. Alice was just...

ALICE (20s) PLOPS down at the table. She wears green and black cowgirl boots, a sleeveless romper, and a long pearl necklace that she's wrapped once around her neck like a choker. Has bleached/partially bleached hair.

NARRATOR (V.O.) (CONT'D)

She was into theatrics.

NARRATOR

Interesting look.

Alice grins.

ALICE

What do you think of my hair? I've been lightening it with lemon juice.

Alice fluffs her hair with her fingers.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

It looked like she'd cracked an egg on top of her head.

NARRATOR

Let's split an omelette.

WAITER comes over to the table.

Alice orders in a sing-song, flirty voice.

ALICE

I'll have a frozen mocha please.

(gasps)

Does that come with whipped cream and sprinkles?

Waiter and Narrator glance at Alice.

Alice giggles.

ALICE (CONT'D)

Sorry!

NARRATOR

Coffee please. And the Florentine omelette.

Waiter nods and leaves.

ALICE

I haven't been drinking this month, you know. I've been ordering club soda at bars.

NARRATOR

Mmm.

ALICE

And on dates, I've been going out for frozen yogurt. Last week, I even asked my boss for a raise. He said he'd have to think about it, but I'm not holding my breath. He's kind of a prick. You know what he said yesterday, in the middle of a meeting? He told me I was the cool girl at the office.

Close up shots of Alice, her pearls, smile, the moles on her arms.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

She did look like a cool girl, and I couldn't help judging her for it.

NARRATOR

You're a little bit of an addict.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

Not that I blamed her, really, but why. Sprinkles in her coffee?

NARRATOR

Just cool it with the yogurt. I can't hear about another one of those yogurt dates.

ALICE

No promises. You know I have a sweet tooth.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

We swapped odd, exaggerated stories  
about men and work and friends  
until the omelette was gone. It was  
as easy and impersonal as talking  
about sports.

Alice, suddenly wearing a football jersey with the eye black  
strips under her eyes:

ALICE

So he looks me straight in the eye,  
and goes, would you fuck me? So I  
say, well, how big is your dick?  
And he gets all offended, and  
leaves!

Narrator signs the check.

NARRATOR

You got your answer, then. Museum?

INT. ART GALLERY - LATER

Narrator and Alice look at the pieces.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

I didn't know anything about art,  
couldn't particularly appreciate  
the abstract stuff, but I liked  
going. It was easy to focus in  
there, unusually pleasant to care  
about things that had nothing to do  
with me.

NARRATOR looks out window of museum at buildings. It's  
overcast.

MONTAGE: Trails, wet field. Fog. Grey sea.

NARRATOR (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Maybe there was more to me than I  
was consciously aware of, maybe I  
wasn't as dull, as obvious as I  
thought. Or at least not as numb.

NARRATOR walks over to ALICE, who stands in front of a huge  
canvas.

INT. INTERVIEW TABLE

Narrator speaks to the camera.

## NARRATOR

Usually, I had trouble feeling anything. It was worse when I was tired, but even when I wasn't, I was almost always uninterested and detached. And when I was like that, I was like a zombie, drawn to stuff that was extreme, and easy-stuff that cut through the numbness. I wasn't an alcoholic, or a sex addict. The extreme stuff I did was mostly in my head, so I had no idea how to stop myself from doing it. And it's not like the stuff I was doing was interesting. They were the same anxious loops and associations over and over, thoughts of food, my ex-boyfriend, my messed-up family, tasks on my to-do list. I bored myself to tears. So when I told my friends:

## INT. ART GALLERY - SAME

Narrator wears the same football jersey as Alice.

## NARRATOR

I'm off men this summer.

Narrator walks, spins around the gallery.

## NARRATOR (V.O.)

I'd meant it, because I was ashamed to admit that I walked down the street compulsively watching the guys who passed me to see if they were looking at me (did they think I was hot?!). I was sick of my narcissism and everybody else's, sick of my coworker's pathetic attempts at seduction, sick of the lonely man in the bar who I immediately regretted kissing, sick of the way my friends hated their bodies, and lusted after losers, and felt coarse, vapid emotions. I was sick of all the self-importance. It wasn't that I thought I was above those thoughts or anything, it was just that the anxious self-loathing hadn't brought me anywhere interesting.

(MORE)

NARRATOR (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
Romantic conquests, compliments and reflections in the mirror, the knowledge that I'd skipped a meal-- all those things caused a momentary satisfaction that felt tight in my stomach muscles, but never lasted long enough to justify it. I felt like a rat, chasing that feeling, a self-obsessed, starving rat.

Alice squints at a painting.

ALICE  
Does this make you think of something?

Narrator stares at the painting.

NARRATOR (V.O.)  
Yeah, whether that guy over there thinks I'm fuckable.

An old man in the gallery.

Narrator counts off her fingers.

NARRATOR (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
How much I've eaten today, all the tasks I have to do at work, how many days are left before I might see my ex-boyfriend, and a bunch of memories involving my ex-boyfriend. Oh also, some voicemails from my mom (she's dead) that I'll probably listen to tonight.

INT. ALICE'S APARTMENT.

Apartment is dingy. Bad lighting, stained furniture. Maps and prayer flags pinned up on the walls, health food in the kitchen. Dirty, crumby, carpeted.

Alice sits down on the couch.

ALICE  
I'm exhausted. Want to watch Friends?

NARRATOR  
How many times have you seen Friends?

ALICE  
It's embarrassing.

NARRATOR  
Why?

ALICE  
My mom says I shouldn't keep  
watching the same thing over and  
over. She said I should watch  
something else.

NARRATOR  
Should? Isn't that a little, like...

ALICE  
I don't know. She's insane. I went  
over to her apartment last week to  
help her pack, and it was a total  
mess. Her T-shirts were stuffed in  
a kitchen cupboard, and she had a  
sewing kit and dehydrated meals  
under her bed. I mean what the  
fuck, right? And she didn't help me  
at all, the whole time I was there,  
she was running around yelling,  
where are my extra sunglasses?? She  
pisses me off. I can't believe  
she's moving to L.A, I swear she  
doesn't even know New York anymore,  
she hates it now. I get what she's  
trying to do, but—

NARRATOR  
Yeah. At least you love her. (beat)  
This stuff you know about her, it  
means you love her, you know.

ALICE  
God, yeah. I love her to death. She  
says, 'Alice, you're stifling me.'

ALICE puts on Friends.

NARRATOR  
I'm taking a shower.

INT. BATHROOM.

Bathroom is gross.

NARRATOR under the hot water with her arms wrapped around  
herself. Narrator drinks the water.



Narrator and THOMAS in the shower, Narrator rubs soap on his chest and leans against him, water running through her hair and down their bodies. Narrator rests her cheek on Thomas's collarbone.

NARRATOR (V.O.)  
 Standing against him like that, I  
 could've died. I really felt like  
 that—it was enough for me. I  
 started thinking about the time in  
 LA when he ordered a piña colada in  
 a hollowed-out pineapple at dinner

INT. RESTAURANT.

THOMAS  
 I'll have the Pina colada.

NARRATOR (V.O.)  
 And he put the umbrella behind his  
 ear.

MONTAGE: NARRATOR writing post-it notes and hiding them  
 around Thomas's room, holding his face in her hands, kissing  
 his hairline.

NARRATOR (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
 I remembered the slope of his  
 handwriting, the way he sat in a  
 chair, how he liked his eggs in the  
 morning, his green eyes and  
 earrings and Onitsuka tigers. He  
 hunched over his tea to sip it with  
 two hands.

INT. INTERVIEW TABLE

Thomas leans over to sip his tea.

NARRATOR (V.O.)  
 He took his glasses off to cry.

THOMAS  
 All the saddest moments of my life  
 have been blurry.

NARRATOR (V.O.)  
 I don't think I would have enjoyed  
 the LA trip alone, even if I'd  
 tried my hardest. I would've  
 doubted myself too much, been  
 overly self-conscious.

(MORE)

NARRATOR (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
And if I'd done it with someone  
besides him, I would've wanted to  
be alone. That was the best part of  
loving him, the alliance. I rarely  
felt it with anyone else, even  
friends, but I was always so proud  
to be with him. When we were  
together, my life felt like it was  
justified, somehow, like more of an  
adventure—in the desert, we slept  
on an indoor porch that had screens  
over the windows, and at night we  
laid together listening to the  
beetles, and the wind.

INT. SHOWER

Camera glides over the many products in Alice's shower.

NARRATOR (V.O.)  
Alice had a lot of shampoo in the  
shower, and a weird number of  
razors.  
(beat)  
She also had an apricot scrub.

INSERT: APRICOT SCRUB

NARRATOR (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
That killed me when I saw it. I  
mean I was already crying about  
Thomas, and that was the same  
stupid scrub my mom used to use,  
and I had forgotten that, I had  
forgotten about the scrub until I  
saw it in the shower. And there was  
no one to tell that to, no one to  
pull into the shower and lean my  
head against. At some point, I  
started talking to you.

Narrator starts cleaning herself with the scrub, shaving,  
shampooing hair while talking out loud.

NARRATOR  
I'm okay. I still miss him but I'm  
doing a lot better, don't worry. I  
know I look like a mess. I want to  
tell you about New York, though, I  
have to tell you what happened this  
morning when I was getting on the  
train.

(MORE)

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

This man helped me with my suitcase, he insisted upon helping me with it, and I feel like that sort of thing wouldn't have happened in Seattle. What do you think? And no one wears patterns out here, they all still dress like you—very back to basics, I like it. I keep getting compliments on your earrings, especially the gold hoops with inlaid diamonds. Your necklaces and boots, too, and purses and jeans and blouses and blazers and even your scuffed Stan Smiths, it's crazy that we're the same size in everything. Alice said she's jealous. She says hi by the way, she says thank you for the purse. I think she's doing okay, it's hard to tell. She really wants a boyfriend. Yeah, I'm just with her for the weekend.

(beat)

Anyways, I'll let you go. I just wanted to say that I'm sorry I don't call you more. Don't be mad, but after you died, I went through your journals and found an entry where you wrote,

INT. INTERVIEW TABLE

MOM

These days the distance between me and Camille makes me sad.

INT. SHOWER

NARRATOR

I'm so fucking sorry. I listen to your voicemails all the time, you know. I should've called you every day, I don't know why I rejected you, why I thought, because we're not exactly alike, it's not that special. The truth is, no one is ever going to love me like you did.

NARRATOR uses Alice's damp, makeup-stained towel to dry off.

She looks in the mirror. Dark circles under her eyes. She looks at her fingernails: bloody nail beds.

INT. ALICE'S APARTMENT - CONT'D

Alice still watching Friends. Narrator changes into clothes.

ALICE

God, I always forget that you have an amazing body. What do you do? My ass is disgusting, see it looks like cottage cheese.

Alice squeezes one of her buttcheeks with her hands.

NARRATOR

I like cottage cheese.

Narrator flops onto the couch next to her.

The two watch Friends for a while. Eventually, NARRATOR yawns and leans her head against the sofa, closing her eyes.

ALICE

There are no hot guys in New York.

Narrator opens an eye. Alice is looking at her phone and frowning. Narrator scooches closer to her, leaning her head on Alice's shoulder.

NARRATOR

That one's a no.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

We argued for an hour about whether giving someone a rose was weird or not.

(beat)

Then we ordered pizza.