

Meet me at the before and after





Opening

A conversation unfolds between the main person, 0, and three others. Each in their own bed, 0 floats between them through open conversation. A spotlight illuminates the pillow talk between the different actors and 0, using this communication to sift through their thoughts and feelings.

0: I can still smell the top of their head, even now sitting two feet apart. Strictly. Any closer and I'd wear their shampoo again and again, but only when it mixes with what I could bottle up and sell as their perfume. No longer a loyal customer, I only get to smell the wafts from their new strangers. Every once in a while I get as close as I can to two feet, and I play our home video that we shot before we began laying on separate sides of the bed. I let the tapes flicker as I move my hand across the skin of our memory. Every now and again when I get so close, I ask them, "do you remember that feeling, right before our hands touched for the first time."

1: Darling, it was fireworks.

0: Yeah. It was, wasn't it?

1: The pillow fort between our hands was warm and soft. Uninterrupted by the drunken clamor of the party outside. Shooting waves between the two of us, it was those pulses in between our hearts, that no one else could see.

0: I just think I was elated to feel that secure.

1: People thought you were more than just elated.

0: Who knew grapes were an aphrodisiac?

1: You know, it's crazy that we felt that way. Before we held more than hands.

0: Right?! It reminds me of them as well. Just that feeling, right before. We're watching the Kardashians but all I can feel is their finger running along my thigh. It was those pulses, reminding me what happens before the night continues. Absolute drama. The tension thickening since I shot a look across the way. We're drenched in thick honey and reaching through the syrup.

Pulling in. Each stride of the finger getting stickier and stickier, until we're draped and gooey. But before we got here, we were far apart, strangers dancing. Until I got too close, and your drink on my shirt was the signal the night would need a new, fresh cocktail. Looks like you need another—

2: Oh shit, I'm so sorry. Can I get you a drink?

0: Of course, as long as you don't spill the next one.

2: Fair, I guess I owe you.

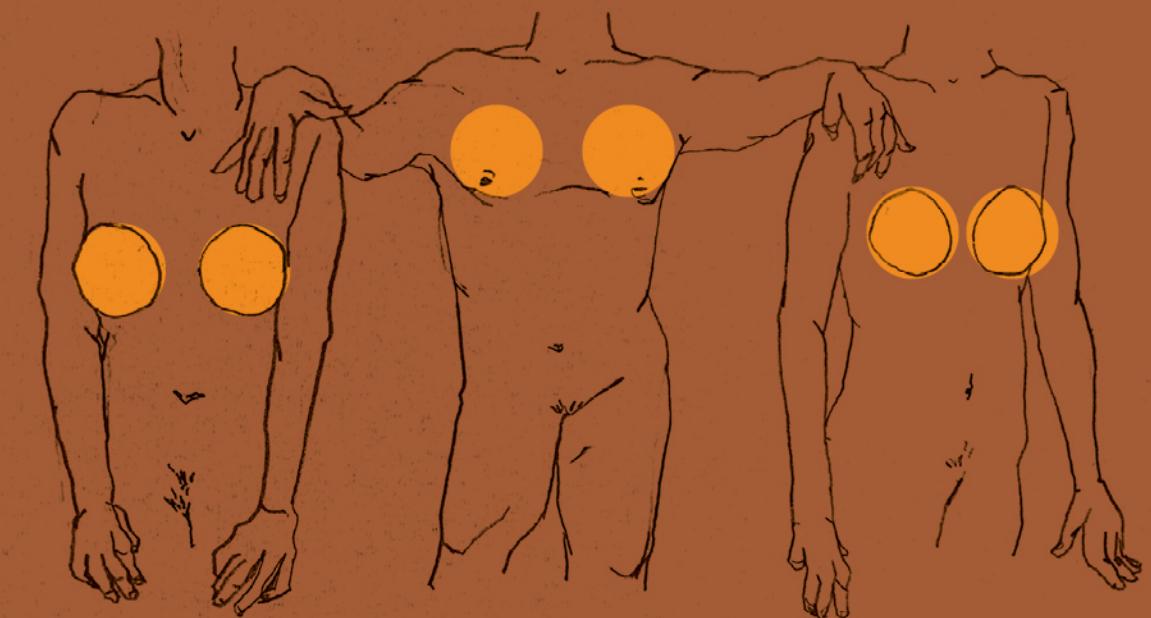
0: I guess you owe me a dance.

2: It's the least I could do.

0: Then I'll keep you in my pocket for the rest of the night until I figure out what's the most you could do. And don't worry, I'm patient and have low expectations. A cheap thrill to forget about is all I asked for, but I might keep you a little longer. I might let the night get a little longer. I might let you turn into honey and then squeeze you out onto my hand and let you slowly drip through the cracks of my will.

3: It's nice isn't it. Letting the heartbeat settle into the soft, subtle thump. Allowing to beat it out. A deep pang, glowing in the aftermath. I don't know if you were more dressed in my memory while I let my desire handle you or my dreams. I've played with your pulse so much you've turned into taffy and now you stretch before spilling your drink on me to a time I haven't collected yet. And never will. I've married the idea and I'm in love with the fantasy. Only ever committing to such, that will be definite.

0: With my heart beating, I can't help but let basking in the sunlight turn into nostalgic digging. The two go hand in hand when my penis is on the line. Never understood beyond its own flesh really, only ever pulsing the food processor of stored moments. Sitting here on this bed, I feel the sheets beneath me but I let my head wander. It's become bigger the more I hollow out my thoughts and see how big this cave goes. I can shout into it. The echoes ripple into each other until they sound the same. And for now, the pulse echoing in my dick rings in my heart, as I dig out this cave. The dark becomes confusing, left to navigate unspoken.



Before

0: Unspoken was before, the noise only came after. Unspoken was the words between us, the silence I always promised myself I would never break.

1: You always talk so much.

0: You always give me so much to think about. How could I not want you to join me?

1: We're already joined though, we're sitting here aren't we?

0: I suppose.

1: You're in my arms, aren't you?

0: I suppose I am. And I suppose I'm smelling your hair again.

1: You'll really never stop smelling my hair. Will you? I won't stop smelling yours.

0: Really? I know we're clinging onto this moment before it changes, before it becomes real, before it's after, but do you think about me after it's over?

1: You know more than me that's something I don't have to answer. Everything we do now, everytime we touch, is to fill whatever that space will be with possibility. Everything I can guarantee right now I will. That feeling of my arms wrapping around you will never change. My arms may wrap around others, but for you, that first touch will always be. Will always be there for you to feel, because a feeling isn't my touch it's because of my touch. And you can take whatever part of that 'because', and you can wrap it around your finger, and you can spin it into thread, and you can make a blanket, just to feel my touch again. Because you know more than me, that the blanket is just as real as when I hug you now.

0: Hug me now, then. I wanna hold your hand. I want to remain in the possibility of what can come next. Next is still your arms, next is still your eyes, next is just the rising action.

1: Next is always next dear. It doesn't change whether I'm here or not.

0: But for now, next is near. And next is here. And next is your arms and not someone else's.

1: Then let's hold our hands and hold onto that.

0: Does everyone hold hands like we do? Because the one before felt just as much.

1: Baby, there's always going to be you and me. There's always going to be you and whoever else there is. There's always going to be that possibility, until it's happened and you move on to the next possibility. We're all just the trains you sit and watch at night. Blowing steam into the sky, chugging away to their next port. Carrying cargo and dumping cargo. Meeting and settling. You live where the train tracks end and you know where they sleep at night. You know what a train looks like when it's dreaming. What does it take to move a train? Well to answer your question- It'd be a lot easier to move trains when the rest of the world remembered and dreamed like you and me.

0: I guess I just didn't want my dreams to be bigger than the world then. I suppose so. That you're here next to me is only but a dream. The softest sheets are always the newest. We can all go around sleeping in new beds, but not everyone chooses to stay. I guess the difference between us and the rest of the world is that we sleep on the trains at night. Houseless, riding the cars into new stations the next day. Giddy with excitement, at the possibility of where we're going. Even though the trains always come back to sleep.

1: Your own bed is much more comfortable than a hotel; but, the rest of the world has an easier time building a home than sharing a bed. I'd rather be a king and queen than a set of twins. I know you dream of being a king, of having your dreams be the size of the world, so why don't you ever try to find your queen? You can have the world.

0: I guess the problem is I don't know what it means to look? The one before you told me I wasn't really looking, and that's when I realized I don't know how. Because for a while I've never felt that pulse of new possibility. I don't think it's going to fall out of the sky, but to never feel a rock skip across my shore— I guess I've just thought my dreams need to be a little smaller. That they need to catch up with the rest of the world.

1: Can't you have the world with me? Don't you want to know what it means to share more than what was? What is? What will? I don't know, the world must be a bunch of chumps if they can't dream like us.

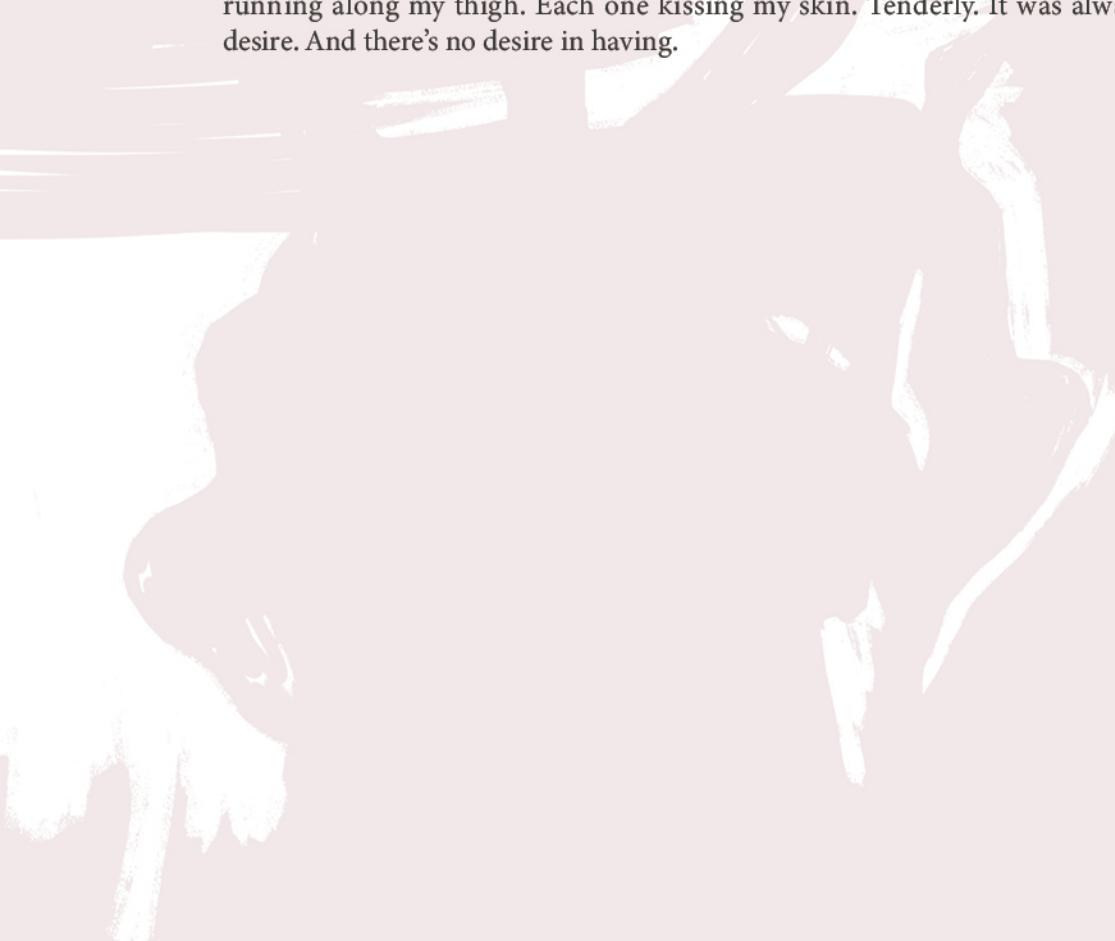
0: You're making me sound like a cynic but I guess the rock fell in the water. It's hard to believe you would want to share the world with me is all. The only reason I think the world is chumps is because I haven't met a fella who isn't a box of rocks yet.

1: Some rocks are diamonds.

0: Not all rocks are worth skipping.

1: But you've always found a rock to throw. You've found me and you've found the one before and you'll find the one after.

0: I suppose the problem is that I'm always too busy counting the pulses of each bounce after it's fallen in the water. I'm so busy twirling possibilities around my finger. Rubbing my hands through them and lathering up in the sentiment of it all. Until I've rubbed my hands raw and my skin aches. It fucking aches so bad. To run all these fantasies through my skin leaves a couple stains, a couple paper cuts always stinging. Always longing for. Before my hands became this rough, I had the gentle touch of a finger finding mine. I had the soft stroke running along my thigh. Each one kissing my skin. Tenderly. It was always desire. And there's no desire in having.



0: But I'm always game for having another.

2: Is a Red Bull vodka alright?

0: Perfect.

2: Then let's share this drink and send cheers out into the night, because it hasn't spilled yet and for now my drink is full with you here.

0: It's not the perfect level of vodka that's sustained me this evening, but the climax I have yet to find. At least not yet on the dance floor, when I'm grinding up on you, and rubbing everything I can over you. Rubbing my intention, my desires, my dreams. But I don't know yet, have the pheromones kicked in?

2: I'm sorry, beautiful— but I can't smell them. At least not now when you're kissing my neck.

0: Then keep letting your hands find my hips. Keep letting them find my abs, because it's enough friction to make the first time we kiss electric.

2: Only time will tell if we ever get that far.

0: Then I'll leave, along with tension I thought we built up. I'm getting hungry. All this dancing is making the vodka wear out with the rest of my body.

2: I'd love to join you, I'm just as hungry.

0: Are you?

2: Of course I am, when I've put so much time into someone as sexy as you are. I wanna get close to you.

0: There's an easier way to get close to me.

2: Oh really? Then I guess we'll wander back into my room and figure out what that is. Cause our bodies haven't touched, at least not yet, except for my eyes wandering around your skin. And my jacket hugging you as we walked down the street, letting you know my eyes are starting to focus on something harder to touch. That something like the smoke in the space between us, as we moved into the car to let the night sustain a little more. A little more and you know that everyone is right about elevator rides- how you can the cut the sex that hangs in the air.

0: Taking a knife to the cloud of sex between us is the end of my night. By the movement of your hands it's the start of yours, even though I can't seem to figure out why you're taking so much time. Why are you letting smoke drift away when the elevator opens? I'm starting to bore.

2: If you're getting bored let's watch a show, maybe we should chill.

0: We all know what that means.

2: And yet the Kardashians just came on and you're still sitting awfully close.

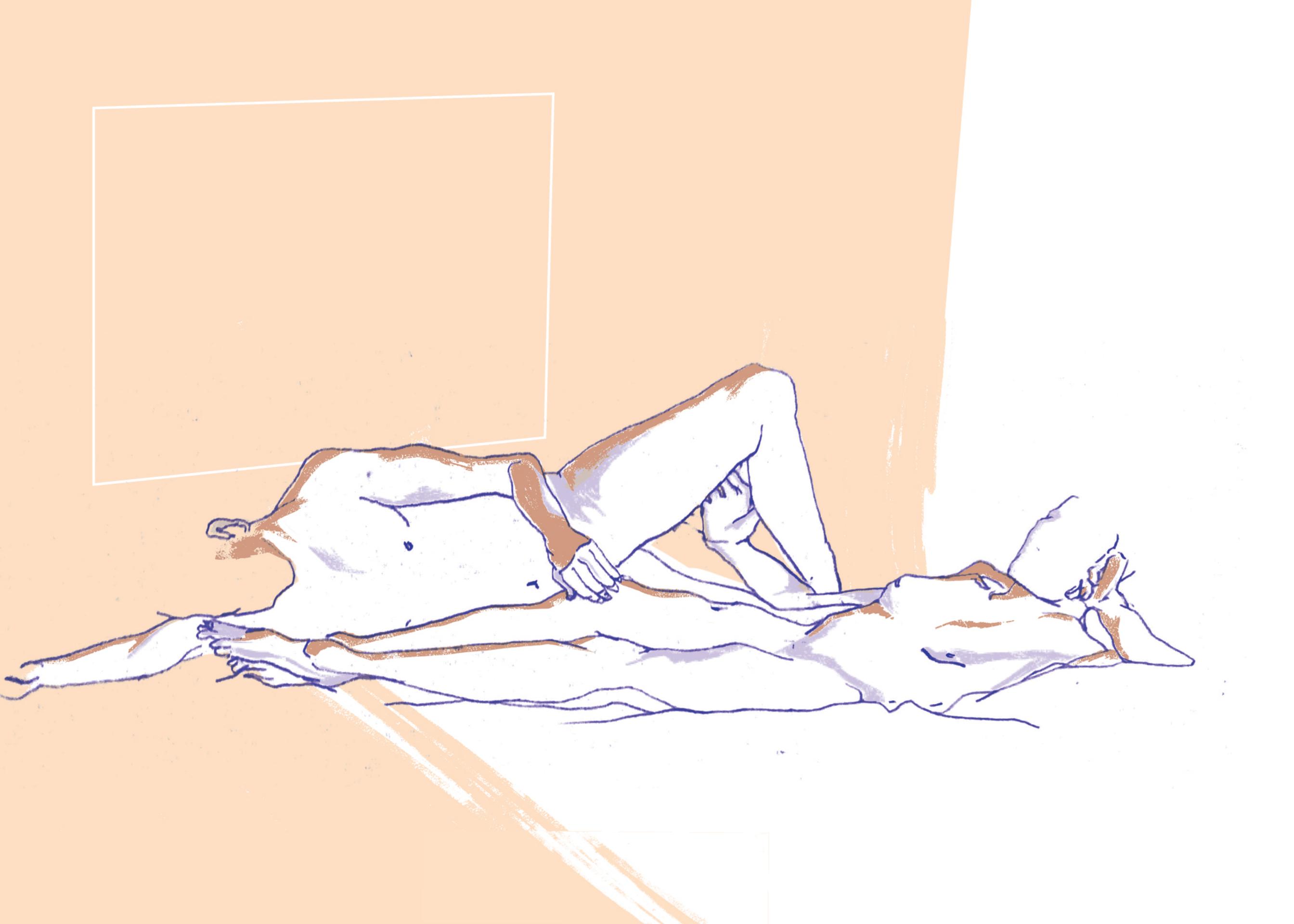
0: What can I say, my devotion rests in the desire between us. I'm needy and desperate to keep it alive.

2: Then as I sit here, I'll let time pass, but not long enough to let you forget what desire feels like. Warm skin running across your cold thighs. Soft glances between the two of us who can't seem to concentrate any longer on the show. Because the real act is what's happening where no one can see. Underneath the covers, a carnival roars.

0: It appears you're right and there's nothing I can do to keep from touching you back. We've moved from our feet to between our legs to my head on your shoulder and still our skin hasn't touched. At least not close enough for me to smell you. Before we get any farther, my night begins to pulse. I begin to feel your heartbeat next to mine. I'm letting you wash over me as I sit here next to you. It's only a night but I can pretend it's an eternal flame with all the kindling we brought here. Enough for fireworks tonight.

Enough to pretend that I haven't already seen what's under the covers and that you haven't already taken the knife and swiped right through this transaction. Everything we've had before this point was mine, and you did everything to make what's next yours. I'm giving it to you don't worry, you've earned that much. For everything I've taken. All of the looks, all the snarky conversation, everytime our fingers flirt with each other's bodies. In return for coming in your bed I've let you come into my desire. Before tonight I've used you for my own fantasy and now when you sit across from me, there's no distance between us and I can pretend my world grew a little bigger. That when we matched, our dreams were as big as each other's.

So take my body, because I'm ready to pretend what's after. Our bones are pulsing for each other. At this moment, I want to give you every part of my body tonight. Cause I'll soon be taking much more.



After

0: Let's have the silence hang a little more, shall we?

2: You might be looking for a thank you, but my night already started fading.

0: It's unfortunate that you don't understand how these slow pulses between our bodies aren't fading. Coming after the release, they carry us on a little longer.

2: How do you mean?

0: It's what you're gonna say when it's your turn to speak. When we start listening to each other again, the questions we ask after our vulnerability is already lost over one another. Tangled in our sheets, our bodies are done and we're left with nothing to do but dream.

2: What do you dream about?

0: You wouldn't understand my dreams, they're fucked up.

2: Dude same. The other night I dreamt that one of the blue guys put his balls on my arm and then asked if I wanted to fuck after the show.

0: and?

2: I don't remember saying no.

0: What do you think it means? Is love just a show, each of us suffocating and then wringing out love's blue balls on the next thing that walks by with a pulse?

2: Haha maybe. I don't really analyze my dreams. I don't think they mean much. It's just our bodies going through the motions of what could've been. Only an exercise, when we dream we let go of the world. Their unrealism is acting out what doesn't matter. Only impulse. I just think to dig for meaning is only projection. We attach our own insecurities into the dreams to feel better about the suffocation of the world around us.

0: Maybe you're right, but when half of my life is spent dreaming, it's fun to pay attention and try and tap into our unconscious. Try and learn our impulses, what happens when we have no filter. How would you live if the boundaries you walk through started to melt and your world got a little bigger? Maybe the difference between is if we choose to ignore the realism. I'd like to think our bodies are more than just such. More than just toys, playing games.

2: You've never played this game before?

0: No... could you tell? I've only ever had the ones before you.

2: Oh shit. What do you like about them?

0: I don't know? What do you like about me? It's kind of a hard question to answer. I mean... I'm in love with how soft they are, how tender it is between us. Something about their delicacy isn't something these games have ever had. Softly. They're safety shooting through my veins. They don't leave marks when they come into my body. Their desire is so traditional, so much less confusing. They don't play games, only the space between us. A respect for the quiet that isn't filled with the smell of coming. Like questions banging at the door.

2: So do you have a type?

0: Oh I don't know. You're giving me more questions I can't answer.

2: Sorry I just find it fascinating.

0: It's okay, I've never had someone ask me before. It's nice to talk about my desires with someone. I like to pretend you're listening. Obviously to what I have to say, but also to my silence. That space between my words that occupies feeling. That's really who I am and that's everything I want you to recognize. Don't you see me? I've brought your body as close as I can to mine. After all of this, I'm giving everything once again. The same as I did before our touch met.

2: You're right in a sense. I can see you talk to the ceiling as you think about how to phrase your new intentions. I can hear you breathe and rustle between the sheets that blanket this conversation. I can feel you sink closer, warming up the space that occupies between us. But the smell might be more fragile, even though you're telling me about the shampoo you use to bathe in reminiscence. Still, I can read between the time you have here and in your projections. I too, share what came between your legs after every time I touched your body. Pulses all the same.

0: There's much to say about what's between our legs but really not much to feel.

2: Or do we wanna get closer?

0: I think that's fine but I can't pay for breakfast.

2: I'll pay for your breakfast, I'm starving.

0: I'll write a poem about a table for two and you can pay for my ride home.
What's left is no longer what we're after. Let's do this again sometime.

2: I look forward to it.

0: I look forward to it too. But it won't be in the same sense anymore. I'll grab the hand you gave me last night and wring it through my skin. Turning back into desire I'll toss you through me a couple times, I'll kiss you and eat you and turn you inside me until you finally come out of me. And there's nothing I can do to empty all of you. I'll always run my hands through the fantasy we made together. I'll sit after you've knocked on my door, and come once again, and let you show me the table for two where we would've eaten breakfast. After lasting a little longer, I'll watch my dreams catch up to the world. I will too, let you fade. Look at my dreams now. You could give them a squish and toss them in the trash.

And I'll do it all again. I'll sit you all along my bed and talk the night away. Our dreams will get so heavy their weight will begin to hurt. As you lay beside me, I wait for your finger to find my back. It's always made its way to my skin. Tell me I'm safe, whisper in my ear, sit next to me in quiet.

3: I'll always sit next to you if you'll let me. I'll give your body its intention. I'll recognize the space between your words, how you feel, what I can't possibly ever understand. Hope is a fucking pillar to hold up the blankets of your dreams. The sheets that are used and loved and no longer new. There's a lake in this bed and it's soaking in the memories. The memories that proved you could actually come close, that someone might be able to sift through your quiet interior.

0: But right now there's only silence. And no one but me is here. My world is my room. My blankets are turning into my skin and my head is becoming a cave. Suffocating, a single pulse.

3: Why didn't you ever consider what would be written in this space?

0: I've been here so long I never thought I'd have to explain it. Your feelings can't be spoken out loud, only your thoughts use such words.

3: Will you try.

0: My fingers are raw from loving all of you. It's best not to crack my voice.

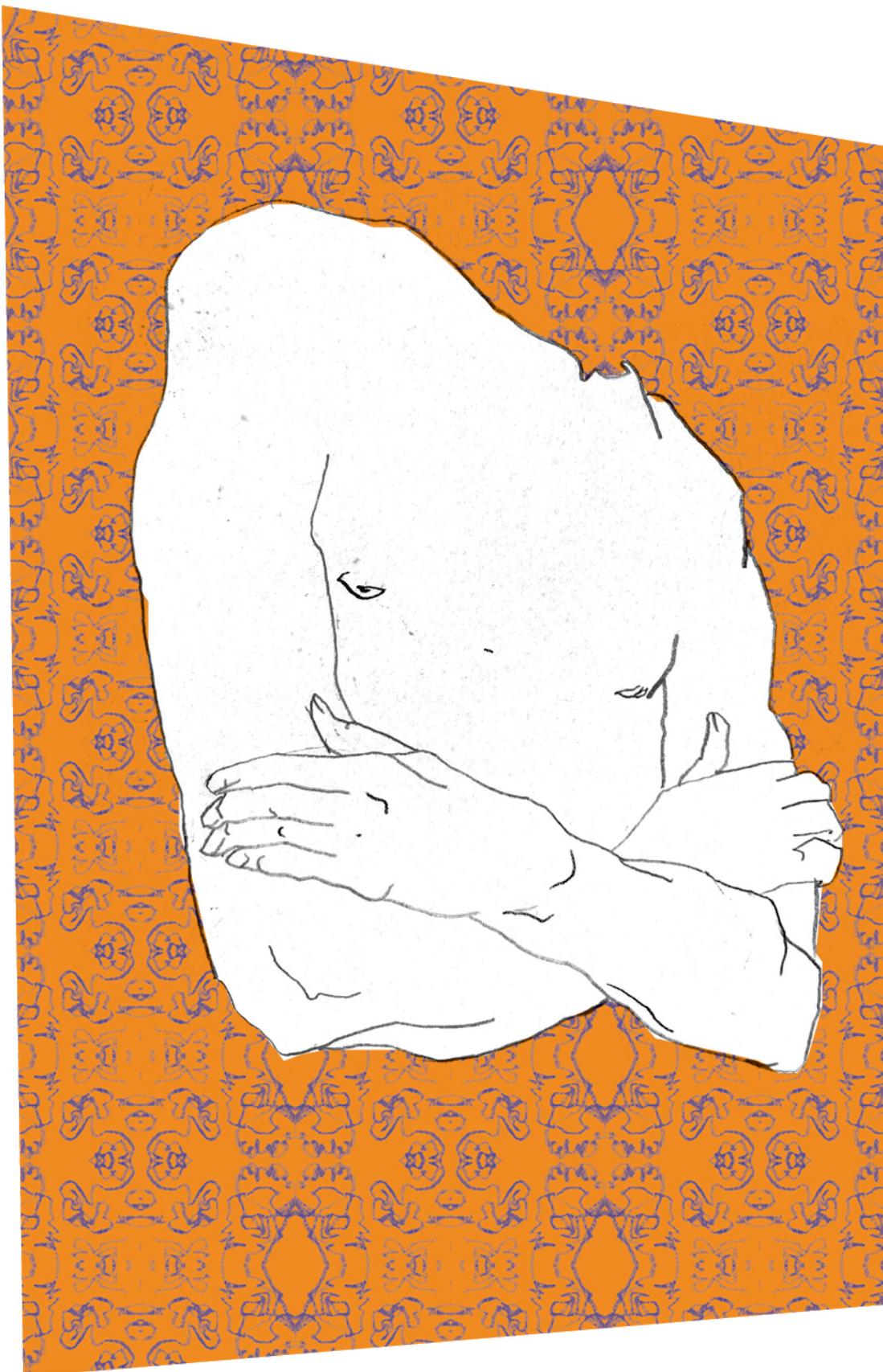
3: All I can say is you've prostituted my feelings and masturbated my love until it comes as hope. Pimp dreams. Nothing but a fantasy. I'll always live for you in the what if. In the stillness between your body. Even alone there's a pulse. There's an imagination. A sleeping train, a skipping rock, a spilled drink. There's still a night to be had, you can still love me once more.

0: As much as it hurts to feel your ecstasy cascade throughout, my heart is better beating on its own. I've gotten lost in your fantasy. In the bloody waters of your teeth, sinking through my skin in every sense.

3: Honey, I'm the aftermath. This is what happens after you spill your blood on a white duvet.

0: How will I know I don't need you anymore?

3: I'm not your necessity, just a self prescription. The high you get from my medication aches your body. A dizzying numbness only clouds the illusion of being physically invalidated. Every time you inhale you give me permission to permanence. A cloudy surrealism. Lingering. Longing. By now you're comfortable with the pain in knowing uncertainty. Stretching around a finger you'll spin me into a golden thread and weave sheets so big the threads single out.



0: When we've dug a hole this big there's no beauty in writing about loneliness. Routine has proven the emptiness spilling over is the only accuracy. Nothing left to think but every other word already said, no string of thoughts just...

Is everything left unsaid, sentences unfinished? Unwilled to write off Tell me when you've become so lonely that even thinking is just deeper isolation.

That's why I'm fucking *all of you*. Do you hear me? The space between us is so fucking loud when I sit you on the bed next to me. When I take your hand and rub it all over. When I will your lips to find my skin. When I'm sitting, hearing you breathe. I fucking feel all of you. Do any of you feel me? Even when I'm the one moving your hand down my back you find the way to torture me. Every goddam time I make you feel my skin it starts to rip. Do you know what fragility feels like?

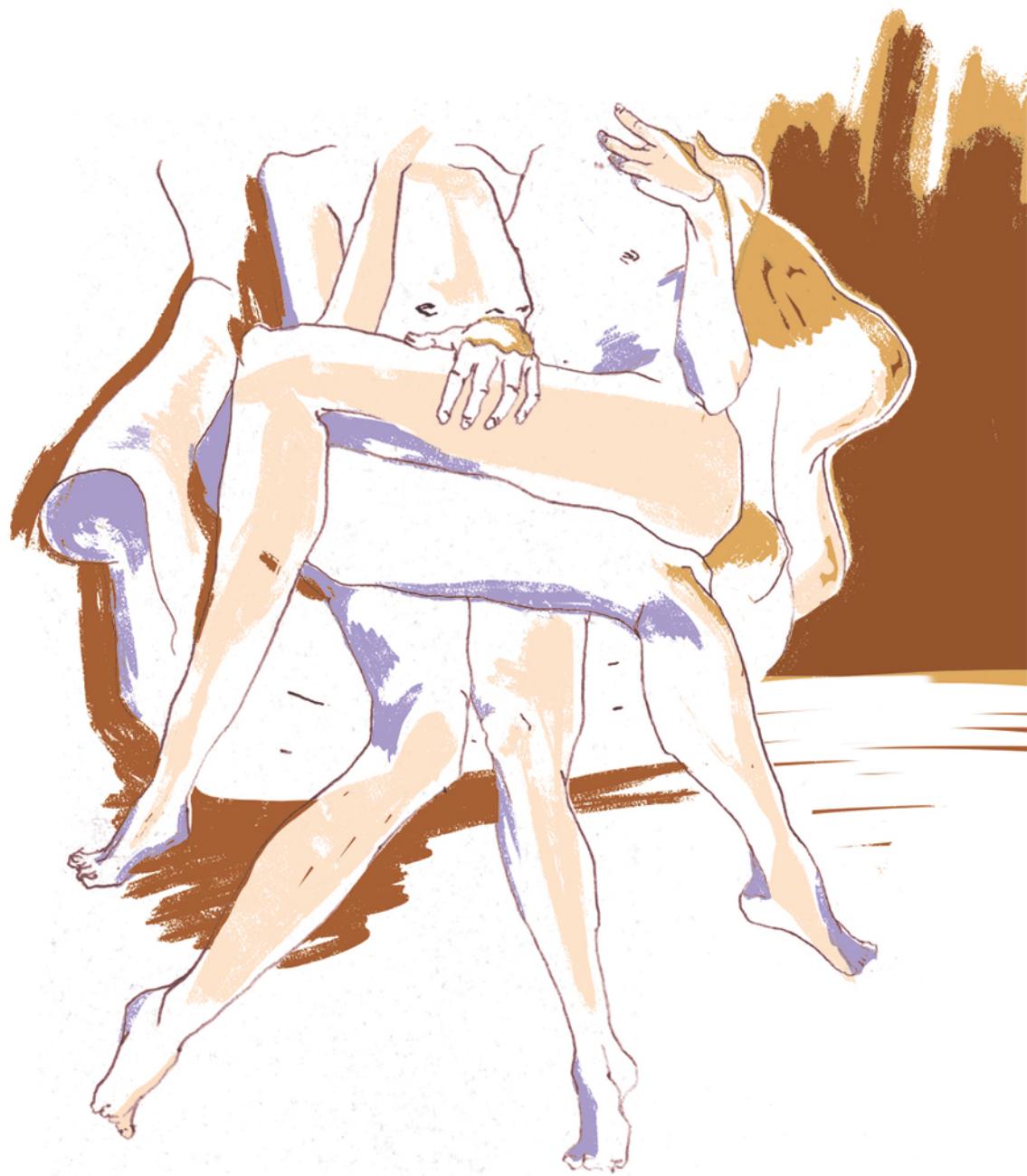
I'm sorry, it's just that I've just become fluent in departure. When I've turned around to leave this many times I can't help but get a little lost. I'm sure you understand, don't you?

1: Darling, I know. The sweetest thing I can give you is another hug. Maybe then it'll remind you what's worth reminiscing. Because in my arms you know the transition to goodbye started before they left your skin. You can't replace the pulse of each heart that's underneath the covers.

0: I forgot there's more than one way to love you. It's too warm when we're all in bed together.

2: We've done a good job heating it up after everything we just did. Swipe right through the cloud of lust with the knife I gave you. When I uncovered too fast, strange lovers in the night. Take the pulse I couldn't kill, even after my night pillow over.

0: I'll take it with my last word, like I always do. Finishing the thought of us, until you're in the background.



Closing

0: I fuck my mirror every morning just to know I'm loved. Surely. Any closer and I wouldn't have the patience to wait over and over, for what mixes between the recognition of two bodies. It's why I need to remind myself I can't pretend I'm in love with waiting. When I have the whole world in my room, sitting on my bed in front of me, I see the aches. In longing, we only stretch our selves into seas not our nights. Using other bodies to sail away from the tears that drown us, looks across the room turn into life savers. In that solace, memories can only find unreciprocated touch. Loneliness is queer. It knows of never being loved, because you never know what can turn a possibility. You can hope for dreams but your body exists in the reality of someone else's world. Skin can be found but I've been waiting all this time for validation. In that, I find how crazy it is for someone to love me. That they might see my dreams and want to be in them. When projections are useless because it's always in between. The feeling of arms draped around me, I wouldn't have to hold on to their intention if they'll never stop. Telling me I'm safe in the blanket of their body, I'll finally get to share with them my love. For that, all there's left to do is wait. Until we meet, in the before and after.

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Written and Illustrated
December 15th, 2020
Self Published | Digital publication with print availability

