

MEREDITH BAKER

A STORY OF A PARTICULAR KIND

Tonight, I left you at your parents' house, at the end of a short dismal road carved into dry hills, dotted with glass bottles that lay like broken bodies. I didn't know how to tell you that I can't bear to see the future so close. They are like you, so dark and unassuming, judgements only forming in the corners of their mouths. I can read them sometimes, when they are drunk and vulnerable. When your mother slips and says, I heard somewhere that vegetarians are unusually angry people? as she takes my empty plate, smiling. Or your aunt, with her arm looped around the short Mexican, asking me why my eyes are blue, as though I hold a good excuse for my history. I watch these questions flash in their eyes and teeth, and I feel as though I am only a mirage or caricature, the pulp of my being made up of empty sentiments. I carry these things with me, like a wasted song that lives only to hear its own breath.

I'll wonder where you are. I'll imagine the black curls that lend themselves so readily to the wind, and those wide eyes that catch and hold the morning light. Your large, deliberate hands kneading dough or curling into a fist that splits the air when you are angry or tangled up in fear. I never wanted to leave you behind. I wanted to take your eyes and fingers and voice and pack them inside the bag at my hip. I wanted to slip my hand down while in a crowded room filled with strangers, or in a dark place of fragmented sounds and objects that don't make sense. I wanted to feel you there-anchored to me.

But I'm about to become an empty space in your existence. I'll be reduced to a shadow and a memory that will stick in your thoughts for awhile. You'll hear my stone-like sigh in the sullen melodies that you play in your head when you're alone. I'll be the distance in your eyes that you drag from room to room like a refugee, unable to believe in a home yet powerless to dream it away. It's because I have regrets that I must leave. They already seem to be settling themselves comfortably into my routine. I rise some mornings, expecting to be confronted by expectations that have already run themselves out. They're tired, without having lived or been given space to breathe. But it is my fault; I have not been able to gather the courage to give them life.

I built myself around you and took your shelter like a pill. I thought I could be the person that woke you in the night with a blow job, while the drunken pilgrims outside staggered back from downtown bars. Or that we could pretend when we were entangled like spiders in a web that the moon would never fall. I thought I could protect you from all the hurt you've had to endure. The pain that you see every time you look at your palms, worn from long days of searching and scavenging and fruitless work. I was wrong. I am not that kind of light-the candle that asks for nothing but to give. I'm not ready for it. There is another world out there that I cannot bear to neglect or to let live only in my imagination. I could sacrifice and give up, like a gust of wind that comes too quickly, tossing up the hem of a dress or tugging at the branches of a small tree, then vanishing under its own weight. You would never ask that of me, though. You'd never want me to give up a thing.

Yet there is something stifling here, something I cannot bear to live inside. These walls, maybe even only imagined, are too high for me to stare into anymore. Their broad, taut faces loom, unchanging and unseeing. I've been trying to find a way to scale them, been studying their flaws and jagged edges. But I haven't found an easy way out. I know that I can't fill all of the fissures that have formed between us, or inside of me.

I cannot be the bearer of broken things. I can never be your martyr.