

Lucy and the Abandoned Tea

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Lucy knew she was in love when she saw the way I made tea. She was sitting at the kitchen bench, hovering in that way people do when they feel like they should help but know they can't, watching me as she had been for a while. We weren't speaking; well, not speaking in the moment, but more talking to ourselves absently and mindlessly and only in tangents we half paid attention to or understood. But it was fine, so completely fine, because the sunlight had come in from the window over the sink and not even the flyscreen could stop the smell of flowers from outside and honestly, talking would be a betrayal to the performance the birds were giving us.

I had told her that summer was the love of my life, and I could feel its breath on my back and its sigh in my hair. The way the rays caught on her eyelashes, making those little silk rainbows in the outlines of her eye – I thought she understood what I meant. I don't know if she did now, but I hope she almost reached my level of adoration. Maybe she confused me for summer, or maybe the two blurred in her mind. It was one of those days when you were drunk off the scent of life going on around you, one of those days when the sober were as blissful as the high. I could have started humming a tampered melody, which I did occasionally if I was comfortable and bored enough – bored not in a restless or annoyed sense, but bored of caring too much about surface level things. If Lucy knew the tune, she didn't join in, but I'd bet she didn't know it anyway. She was the type of person who'd pretend to know the lyrics of someone else's music, and clumsily trip over her syllables, but with a quiet confidence I was achingly jealous of. There was no need for her to learn the words, or rather for her to learn anything at all. She didn't need to seek the world; the world just came to her. Lucy was solid and stationary and sure. She sat at my kitchen bench and tapped her bitten but lacquered salmon nails in a half-hearted rhythm but didn't try to create a façade of being familiar with whatever melody it was.

Later, she would tell me through a mouthful of almond croissant that she would never pretend or lie, not to me. It was trying too hard to be an offhand comment, but I noticed the way her eyes never met mine. It was like a phone number written on the inside of a coffee cup. She was wearing heavy mascara that day, and little flecks caught in the petals of sensitive skin above her cheeks, but I didn't tell her. I smiled at her softly even though I knew she wouldn't see and moved on, ignoring her confession.

But that day was good. I had even called my parents earlier, and managed to maintain my patience throughout. I had gone on a walk, in the first hours of the

morning when it was too cold to relax. I was feeling on top of it all. And Lucy was there, of course, a current. That always helped me lean more into my own body. She reminded me of who I was, or rather, where I'd come from. And I was cooking for her – baking. I hardly ever did that at all.

Everything I knew how to make had come from boys, eager to impress me, happy to indulge me, teaching me slowly and caringly and sweetly. They would cook and I would linger by their side, slyly provoking them and getting in the way, until they kissed me with exasperation and sugar on their tongue or the food was unfortunately ready.

Lucy didn't do that, though. She just watched me across the kitchen bench until I spilled my tea and she got up and walked over and gently, delicately really, wiped away the stain from the front of my shirt. And we both looked down at my mess, and let the kitchen give way to a fall, and my cheeks were stung with what I couldn't say.

And the air from her lips spun into mine.