

ESTURE

8

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Thanks for reading
gesture.

Matt

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I understand that I don't have the rights
to the lives of strangers.

You are currently dealing with shit that is not mine but
if you could, just for a moment,
drop everything and
provide me with very specific instructions
on how to radically improve my life,
it would not go completely unnoticed.

I feel selfish as soon as another person wakes up.
I feel entitled the moment a shoulder
accidentally brushes against mine.
I feel you looking at me but I don't look back.

How soon after walking into a room
am I legally required to announce to everyone
that I am an asshole. Just wait,
you will feel it too. It travels.

My aura isn't a color,
it's a sign tied around my neck that says,
I am naturally and permanently inclined
to believe in pretty much everything,
take this bit of information and run,
just have fun.

It's a sign that says, DON'T WORRY.
I WILL FIND A WAY TO MAKE THIS ABOUT ME.

It's a sign for a buy one get one free sale
except the first one's free too.

It's the sign you haven't been waiting for
but it shows up anyway
early Monday morning,
in the form of your head surrounded by the toilet bowl,
a blessed porcelain halo.

It's a sign with a circle cutout and through the cutout
you can see my breast pocket
and on the breast pocket there is a picture
of a big dog walking a small dog.

No, my aura is not a sign.

It's not a sign, it is a reminder that inside of me
is leftover spit from every lover I have never loved,
it's not a sign and it is wrong.

Sometimes it only takes one night
to create a space for someone else
and then when they leave no one is left
to teach you how to close back up.

I have spent my life so far
learning how to close
and I have spent yours too.

Candy says, I've come to hate my body, and all that it requires, in this world.

Candy says that using a drinking straw when you drink sugary drinks protects your teeth from decay, but when I say that pursing your lips around a drinking straw causes fine wrinkles to form around the mouth, Candy immediately pulls the straw from her glass of iced tea and throws it on the table.

Candy has two big dogs, except one is dead. She has two sons and an orthodontist husband, Nate.

Candy says she worshipped my mother as a child and prayed for them to be sisters, which, they found out eventually, they really are. Sisters. So Candy is my aunt. Candy says she prayed to have a daughter but God gave that daughter to my mother instead.

Caroline says, as she makes up her eyes, you ought to learn more about yourself, think more than just I.

Caroline says there is no grammar on your face. She says of course you can repeat a word until it's meaningless, but have you thought of pushing past that, and continuing to repeat the word until it means everything?

Caroline says, if this pattern will never be repeated, how can you call it a pattern in the first place? Caroline says it is not a gift at all if you call it a free gift. These are not semantic questions. They are gender questions, political questions.

Caroline says there is no shelter in you anywhere. She says it's not love but it's not bad. Caroline says she's told this story a thousand times.

She's looking for a hairy star. She thinks what she sees is the entire mountain, but she doesn't understand the rules of perspective.

Candy says, I hate the big decisions, that cause endless revisions in my mind.

Candy says the opposite of what Voltaire said.

Candy says good is the enemy of the best. She doesn't say that if you wait too long for something sweet and tender, everything will overripen and ferment. She doesn't say that the meanest horses offer the smoothest ride.

Candy doesn't say why she's a cancer nurse. She doesn't say she doesn't mind the soft, meaty smell of disease.

Candy says ambiguity is one of the most disturbing human emotions. Candy says she is numb from neck to toes after sitting in the freezing rain to watch her son play football, but she doesn't notice until the game is over.

America the Harley haircut reprobate!
Your exchange students fraught with errands
and your fruit juice very boastful! I consider the price
of your drugs in reason! Your bridges diligent
in suspension! Is there nothing you will not put
on a t-shirt! Also the high five is beautiful!
I have read it was invented by a homosexual outfielder!
Dear baby you're doing all right! O the dreamy light
of membership gyms passed at darkness!
Skateboarders blasting the honk and tonk!
Two children, two jerseys, they are both one player!
How the tourists rush for hot dogs in your terminals!
Gastric ID fountain! The worries in a love go random
as mosquitos! Said Roland Barthes! Croquis maesuier
is a sandwich you might suspicion! Pedalist canary yellow
tows eight neat crates of trash! Her gravity center
low official! Boy plays yo-yo while family car on blocks!
Father, goateed, disbelieves the bill! Grease monkey waves
at the traffic and describes how have the rushes evolved!
Hoop of a basketball pole, sized for the children, crowds the Dumpster!
AM-PM, man: —My favorite's the Beale song! Where the guy goes,
do I really feel the way I feel! And I'm like, hell no you don't!—
Betty White is a trend of your Twitters! Yellow Hitler car you call a bug!
America your sassy bumper stickers! I have been learning the words
and yell at them when seeing in action! A taxi after rain is hardly yellow
under cherry blossoms! Every quickly market cappuccino is gourmet!
There is no such question anymore as how! Many things for the feet
are elastic! There are stickers on the poles which just say BRITNEY
SPEARS! Your stickers heretofore beyond a crude request for commerce!
Your stickers beyond everything, and the only word for them is one of yours:
yonder! Your stickers are yonder! Man drops a green t-shirt into the guitar case
of homeless song man! Updates are the action does a status! Modes of waking:
"sad, wracked (with tenderness), affectless, innocent, panic-stricken!"
Said Roland Barthes! I do not sit in the city all day! I do not sit in my bedroom
and wait for my birthday! I am trying to put my feelings outside. Help me
if I give too much. For love for you I see forever. Je t'aime, Sea Bass.

Thanks but I'll skip the construction
in favor of a wave.

It felt nice to be a person, not a person
with a phone.

Grasped the true magnitude
of hakuna matata

and broke down weeping
in the shower.

Jean Genet and sit ups,
wind through bamboo curtains,

the fire spinner on the badminton lawn (two girls stop by),
the cackles of perspiration on the plastic above

the basmati rice.
The narrative is always bigger.

A photograph of Michael Jordan where he doesn't have enough fingers
for his championship rings, but then he has lunch

with Kobe Bryant to see whether Kobe's German
doctor-wizards can help Michael play basketball at fifty.

The first of this moon in a hundred-ass years.
A hundred moons between the couple exchanging

backpacks while one goes to the bathroom.
Blood timeout like in the NBA.

Recognition or confirmation bias?
Prayer or the pizza economy?

Convenience retail or destination retail?
First is the question of whether we care about the house people.

The people in houses.
Of course Timex would sponsor!

the marathon. Of course Jean would miss
the meeting. The people in showers.

The bamboo splinters all over the fire
before or after it's spun.

Grasped the true magnitude of one hundred-ass
backpacks and broke down waving

above the rice. It's cooling.
RIP Michael Jordan.

The universe recalibrates itself & I wake up
to a new pair of basketball sneakers.
Princes & paupers alike celebrate
the arrival of an Uber car.
There is tinsel in my fur
& a trap beat in my thyroid
& I am on the verge of turning
into a whale & galloping
through a dandelion field.
I am full of nothing but fear
& I have never felt so perturbed as I do
when eating pancakes with white people.
What I mean is you are a unicorn
& the world is as delicious &
delirious as a brunch.
How are you feeling this petasecond?
I am feeling like a museum
of balloons & endangered chinchillas,
& rasta horns echo through my halls
to wake up my rich neighbors
& scare away colonial-era ghosts.
Every day the sun rises
& I fall more in love
with the internet.
Nothing is simple
& everything is terrifying.
How disgusting, the sound of an umbrella.
How horrifying, the sight of snow plows &
O! how boring it is to be on the internet
without champagne & oranges!
My heart grows plural &
there is mud on my Jordans
but yet I can still smell the sweet,
dumb spring blooming like a marijuana
leaf as legal as a flamethrower.
Where is the moon?
What is poetry?
How many cockroaches can one person step on?
I don't have many answers
but my mouth is full of blackberries
& I am waiting for you under a
sewage drain with three lottery tickets
& each of the tickets is a winner,
& you are a winner, too.
I want to ride around the ocean
with you on a boat as real
as a football & a love as
real as a hologram.

I want to take you to Turkey
& eat tahini with you
until you get an email,
because sharing an email
with you is even more
fun than an annoying earache
or any other alliteration
I will be able to make
during the course of this
performance.
I want to email you an otter.
I want to email you an apple.
I want to email you until
I am in your spam folder like
a weight loss or a cock dream.
I want to email you a mountaintop
as quiet as I am loud,
& then I want to climb that mountain
like it's history or abolition
& then I want to lend you my
Lungs & let you scream that
we are all tessellating like salon skin
& simultaneously killing ourselves
but the world is screaming yes
& we've only got so many ears
to feel it with.

i make history by pressing stop a bunch of times on this recorder.
phase: idiotically fucking up what's like marriage,
as 25 year old poets have across all times and cultures.
phase: trickling melt down the mountain.
this next bit is dedicated to shutting up
about my horsebones
and cleaning my teeth more thoroughly.
pink light on my skin at dusk
makes my arms beautiful to myself
with the trees and houses drenched
in the blood of my eyes.
phase: men laugh in a lit upstairs.
pretty sure every 26 year old poet
throughout history
has heard someone laugh
in a house
and been borne over the house.
i've walked with people and some i've loved.
i've watched the video for 'smack my bitch up' and been confused,
as all 24 year old poets before me.
phase: a man says to me that women
do not have men's capacity for 'love'.
but throughout history, women have striven and so have men
and women have missed the mark of women and men
and men have missed the mark of women and men
and i have eaten greens today.
this part of town smells momentary
like beeswax.

i'm sitting here on a plane like,
'should i be learning the art of war right now?'

then i start
thinking of ways i could make the men
sitting on either side of me
fear me.

it's likely they're already afraid of a thing
as small as my smell.

it seems like everyone wants to know more about her
well, she has a rainbow tattoo from her hand to the back of her head
she wants to play goldeneye slappers only
she's out in the snow looking for owls
she likes to joust with stalks of brussel sprouts
she's talking about 7 but holding 3
she has a corgi named Oppenheimer
she's wading in the underbrush looking for her dodecahedron
one time she made mashed potatoes, and put a little canoe in the gravy
she recites eminem lyrics, but speaks like shakespeare
one time she set a water balloon on fire
one time she got on my shoulders and cut off a limb of a monkey tree
she dances on her umbrella
she's always getting new umbrellas
she's been saving her chewing gum since puberty
whenever she uses someone else's computer she copy/pastes their search history onto her
blog dedicated to people's search histories
she writes in italics
her parents went to church and spoke in tongues
she's really good at speaking in tongues
she's really good at kissing
she kisses inanimate objects
she excitedly points out the moon
her farts smell like lavender
it's the strangest thing

I PICKED UP MY BABY BROTHER AND THREW HIM INTO THE SUN HAHA

JUST KIDDING I PICKED HIM UP AND SQUEEZED HIM ALL THE WAY INTO ME,
BECOMING TWICE AS POWERFUL AS BEFORE

OR LIKE ONE AND ONE HALF TIMES AS POWERFUL

OR I GUESS LIKE A THIRD MORE POWERFUL HE WAS ON THE SMALL SIDE

ACTUALLY, I JUST PICKED HIM UP AND GAVE HIM A PRESENT

I LET HIM GAZE UPON ME

SO THAT HE MIGHT KNOW WHAT TO WORK TOWARDS

ACTUALLY, I PICKED HIM UP AND THEN BEGGED FOR A DOLLAR

HE IS 35 YEARS OLD AND I AM 36

PLEASE GIVE ME A DOLLAR BABY BROTHER YOU ARE VERY HEAVY AND THIS IS BAD FOR
MY BACK

joshua jennifer espinoza [THERE IS NOTHING 14
INHERENTLY SPECIAL ABOUT ART OR ARTISTS]

it takes time to figure out what you want to do
with your life.
there are moments you are walking
down a hill and you hear the sound
of birds doing something not too far away
(or maybe the sunset,
or maybe the city,
or maybe a woman you see on the other side of the street
who only dreams in technicolor
and secretly whispers your name to herself whenever she
brushes her hair from her face).
it all makes you think of beauty.
when i walk down hills people shout
things from passing cars.
this too is beautiful in its own way.
it makes home a pillow,
light a god,
silence a sugar on my lips.
anyway, today i learned that words don't even exist, so it
doesn't matter.
neither does blood.
neither does skin.
neither does pain.
neither do the conditions that bring all three together.
it's all made up.
i am so happy about this.
the whole universe rests inside the head of a sullen white male.
this must be why things are so bad.

forgiveness tastes just like first holy communion
shallow ponds feel like flash memories
like questions we prepare in advance

i'm doing all this just to get to know you

trying to pronounce words that are a soap bar in my mouth

trying to relate before saying, and what's your number?

remembering the sequence of events

and what color are your eyes?
and what will we look at tomorrow?
and is there a word for the feeling of eternity you feel during an earthquake?

i've heard it is 'seconds'

but i didn't remember you during the storm warning
or when the waves came in across my feet,

just that the neighbors cooked cactus after i tasted jesus
after i held my hands up to the priest

at home we had fajitas
later my my dress was stained with diet coke
my veil covered in blue frosting

you tell me what the initiation was.

i hold babies and smell their heads,
think, what will you want when you understand
what will you wish your first words were
what would you choose for your options

the earth screams and shakes sometimes and we ask,
are we okay?

i can tell you the hudson sounds just like broken glass when it breaks along the shore

I want to shake apart and that's how I'll die. I think about it when I listen to hymns from the church I grew up in. I think about turning into dust when I listen to hymns, that my body will vibrate enough that when I think about it I hum hum and buzz and I want to die in that way, humming, I think, it won't be because of a hymn or a drone or a buzz or a hum. I'll hum and shake apart and think about when I was in church as I grew up to hymns and how I want my body to vibrate enough to shake apart and that's how I'll die. When I drive on the interstate, at night, I see where deer have been hit. I think about the marks swerving between lanes and off to the side of the road into my head lights and that's how I'll die. I think about being a deer and hearing the car coming on at 80 mph. I think about being a deer and getting hit by the car and my body being dragged by the fender and I think that's how I'll die. I want to spill enough blood to cover 30 yards of road and I think about what parts of my deer body will be left behind me under a truck wheel and I want to swing between three lanes of interstate's road. My body will give and my neck will break and that's how I want to die. It wont be slow and building and overwhelm me in some huge resolve but immediate and blistering and that's how I'll die. I'll die as a deer on the side of I-20. I'm driving on I-20 and I'm humming and thinking about the church I grew up in. I'm humming the same frequency my body will resonate at when I shake and vibrate and buzz apart. I'm thinking about hymns and driving on I-20 when I hit a deer, killing it, humming.

We're laughing. It's late. The four of us are in your living room. Me, you, your roommate, and Derek. The music is loud. It's something I've never heard before. You love that. That's your thing. Derek rolls his eyes at you. You're going on about another undiscovered almost-was, a real gem. You hand me the bowl and I take another hit. The door is open. I blow the smoke outside to make your roommate happy. She's in love with you. She keeps saying you're like a brother. But every time we talk she interrupts. Yelling across the room at you. She can't stand me. She's so drunk she's almost not even there.

We pass around the Jameson. Everyone takes a pour except your roommate. She's drinking white wine, something with a tree on the label. She finishes her glass and asks you for another. You ignore her. I get it. But anyway, she doesn't need it.

Derek asks you about California. You talk about leaving. You talk about getting out. I nod but in my mind I'm running. I don't think about how I'm standing still. I can't think about that anymore. Another drink and I don't care about anything.

Your roommate tells us that story from before. We all try not to laugh. But I know I'm just like her. Even though I don't want to be. I think about the last time I saw you. At the bar down the street. We sat close together, legs, arms touching. Everyone kept saying we looked like a couple. My friend was there. She saw it.

Later on, in the parking lot, you kissed me. There was no one around. There was one streetlight; bright white, a blinding sun. Beyond it, everything else faded away. It was dark. The asphalt was broken. I told myself, be careful. I leaned against the car. I slid down. I slouched down against the tire.

I know I'm no longer charming you. I feel the glow dissipate. My smile fades. You watch my make-up run. You see the black circles under my eyes. They grow darker as I sink into the couch. You're next to me. You turn away.

Your roommate is in a heap in the corner. She's sleeping like a baby. Her glass has tipped over. Wine pools near her feet. I move closer to you. What are you doing? You say. You don't say it like you care. Derek stands in the kitchen. He watches us. His face set in hard lines. Your eyes are cold. I kiss you.

What are you doing? You say. It sounds harder this time. Derek clears his throat. He takes a long swig of his drink. Nothing, I say. I sink back down. You're drunk. You both say. Or one of you says. Or one of you and then the other. I don't care. There's a part of me who sees it so clearly now, even though your face has doubled. Your face was always doubled.

Do you want me to take you home? Derek asks.

You should go, you say.

I get up. I take Derek's hand, interlacing our fingers. He looks around. What are you doing? He says.

Why does everyone keep asking me that? I let go of his hand. Outside I get in his truck. It smells like cigarettes.

We drive. It's late. Or early, more like, just before the sun. I like to see the city like this. A pawn shop neon's sickly glow. The easy familiarity of the corner gas station. Nearby, a few people loiter, but the hush has not yet lifted. They see me. I look away.

You like him, Derek says.

I don't.

Why are you lying?

I never lie, I say.

He taps his fingers on the steering wheel. He sighs. I cross and uncross my legs. I pull my dress down.

I'll never understand you.

There's nothing to understand.

We're at a traffic light. It's almost over. I turn and look at him. His face a hazy red. I kiss him. He kisses me, pushes me away.

What is wrong with you? He says. Someone honks. The light has changed.

Nothing, I say.

In the driveway, he turns off the car. Birds fill the trees around us. They are just waking up. They sound just like they used to, when I was a kid.

Let me walk you inside.

No.

I get out of the car. I'm barefoot. The ground is cold. Small rocks dig into my heels. Derek follows me.

Are you crazy?

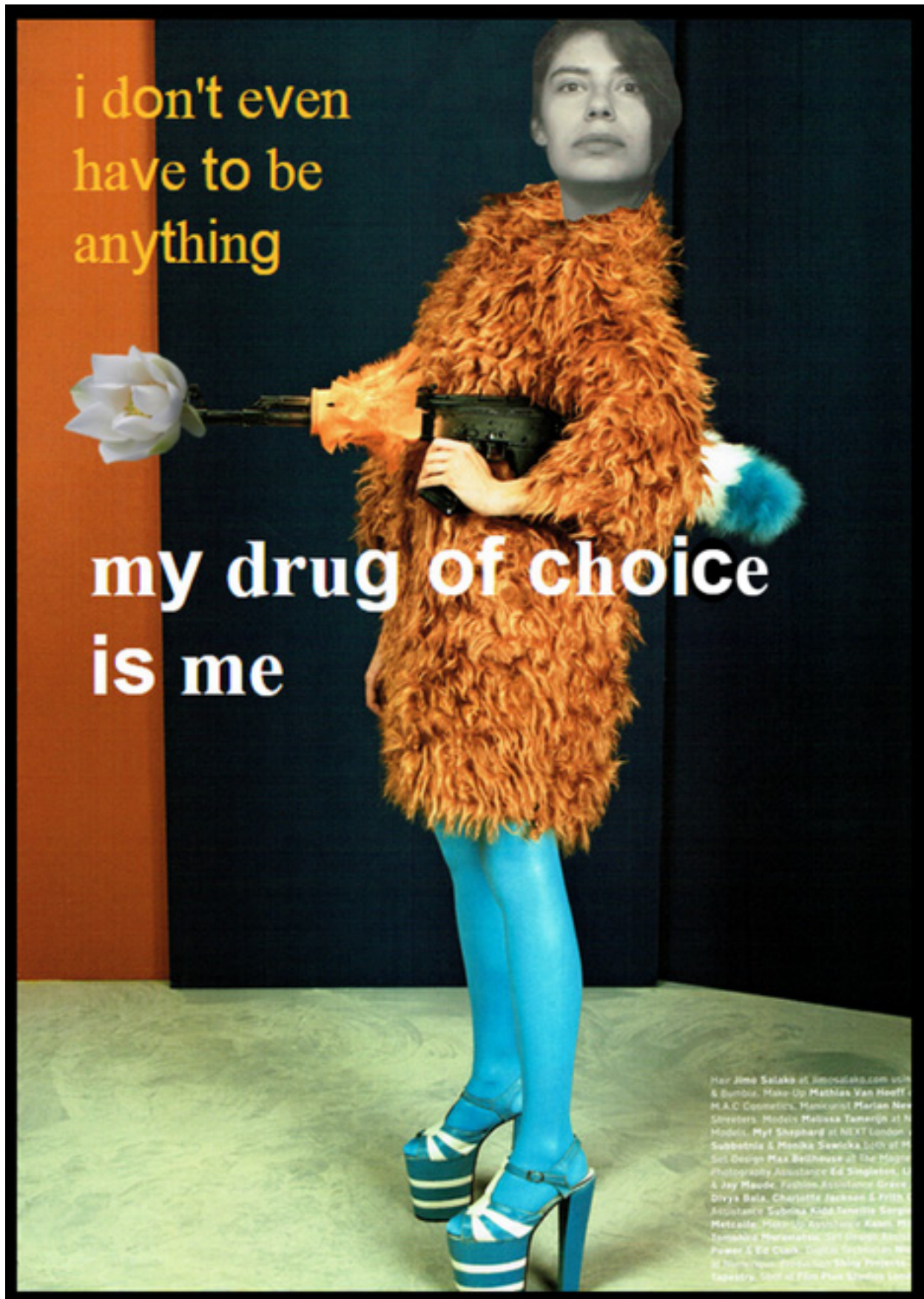
No, I say. The sun is coming up. I'm on the neighbor's lawn. Lawn to lawn to lawn. I cross them. He pulls me back. No.

I'm running now. He chases me. At the dead end, I stop. I turn to face him. His lips move. I don't know. It's quiet. I can't hear anything.

We were in Bolivia. I had recently broken up with my girlfriend. I was feeling pretty shitty. Because of things and life. We wanted to see the salt flats. We signed up to see the salt flats. When we signed up our guide said, "The salt flats are the size of Utah." I thought: Utah. I said, "Utah." We stared at each other for a while. We went with a bunch of people. We got in this van and started driving. It was fairly cold. Our tour guide told us it was the Winter Solstice. I said, "What does that mean?" and he said, "Cold." We drove for a long time. We reached the salt flats. I was sitting next to an Israeli who kept talking about the army. He kept smiling and telling me about all the kinds of guns he had fired. He said, "Israel is the best country in the world." I couldn't tell if he was staring at me or out the window. My iPod was broken. I asked someone if I could borrow their iPod. They said, "Yes." I listened to Damien Rice "9 Crimes" on repeat. I felt sad. It felt good to feel sad. We drove over large amounts of salt. It seemed like a place you could get lost in or set a land speed record if you wanted. We walked around these things that would have been islands if there was still water over the salt flats. There were cacti on the islands. Me and my friend weren't really talking. Because of spending too much time together and other things. Sometimes one of us would speak and the other would say, "what" even though we had heard what the other person had said. We got back in the van. Kept driving. Got out. All you could see was blue sky and flatness and salt wherever you looked. Everything was white. It was hard to make out depth perception. We took photos that made it look like you were walking into a Pringles Can. Me and my friend had planned to run around naked on the salt flats. We looked at each other and then took off our clothes and ran around naked on the salt flats. It felt good. I felt better. That night we slept in a salt hotel. The walls were made of salt. So was the floor. The beds were very stiff. I think it got down to minus twenty. I was very cold. We drank lots of whiskey to stay warm. I couldn't feel my toes. I couldn't feel my hands. I put on everything I owned. Someone had a joint. We smoked the joint. We started talking about chocolate. Someone said, "How good is chocolate." We went outside. There was a farmer driving by. We waved at him. He stopped. He drove us through the middle of nowhere under lots of stars in the back of his truck to a convenience store which was more of a thatched hut with Oreos in it. We bought lots of Oreos. We walked back home. I was worried about my acne. I had this thing where I washed my face every night no matter what. I walked outside and found a tap. I turned the tap on. I covered my face with water. It was hard to breathe because of how cold the water was. I washed my face. It was hard to turn off the tap because my hands weren't really working. I walked back inside. I cried a little. Everyone was asleep. I pulled my beanie over my face and thought: you aren't really working. Referring to myself. In the morning our tour guide lit a fire under the engine to defrost the engine. He defrosted the engine. We kept driving. The sun and the moon were in the sky at the same time. We stopped by a lake with lots of pink flamingos. My friend said something and I said, "What" and he said, "What" and then we punched each other in the face. It was dumb. We stared out the window. The trip took three days. On the last day we went to some hot springs. We didn't have swimming things so we went in our underwear. We laughed about punching each other in the hot springs but agreed it was necessary.

After the hot springs we went to a pizza place. The pizza place was famous for being the only pizza place at Uyuni. There was a competition that said if you could eat the largest pizza you got a t-shirt. I ate the largest pizza and vomited afterwards. I watched the cheese and bile hang from my lip and stretch to the ground. And I thought about humanity and how I was a human. And how we stretch in opposite ways. How we break. I thought about

the dumb shit we do to other people and to ourselves. And I wiped my mouth because I wanted to do better. I wanted to try. I wanted to be more talented than I was at being a human being. And I yelled into the future: how many talents do you want? And the future yelled nothing so I yelled back: I want to have all the talents in the entire fucking world.



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