

**little with**

*baggage*

We have not talked in several days. I cope by sitting in my car often. I teeter at red lights. I wonder whether it makes more sense to cancel our trip. It would mean unpacking. It would mean no respite before September; no relief from stale habit. No time to fix what's gone wrong between us. I become evening traffic in the morning, coasting, pale and burnt out. On fogged up windows, I imagine a better me; I make long lists of could've's, shouldn't's, can't's and won't's. I bite my lip, roll the windows down, erase. You get your hair cropped.

You are restless. You legitimize the experience of flight by fixing the crinkled edges of our connecting tickets; you fix Edmonton to Chicago, the long crease in Chicago to Amsterdam, and press it finally between the pages of your carry-on book. The half-moon smile you offer is itself an old friend, it contains a phrase such as 'good stuff in the long grass,' evoking ideas about places we haven't been in a while. You pull up the arm rest and nest with me, warm. The pitch black outside the window washes over, slows down time. I begin to think there's still a chance that I'll find your body in the long grass again.

We wait an hour for our bags at Schiphol airport. Possession of the house is at 10 A.M. We have little more than half an hour. Rubbing your eyes, you ask if I have our host's telephone number. The smell of a hundred cab drivers idling hits me just as your question does. I don't want to admit I didn't think of that, so I keep walking. A stubby, flushed man starts loading our bags into a cab before we've got a word in. I point at our map, at the house on Osdorperweg. I speak to him in slow English, he shrugs and laughs. He laughs as he drives us in and out of dead-ends. He laughs as he backs out of roads under construction. He laughs as he drives us far away from everything we thought was Amsterdam.

*transit*

The cab turns onto Osdorperweg. We drive down, turn, drive up once more, as if rising number on fare meter indicates coefficient of accuracy; 'I am 45, no, 46 euros sure that this is your place,'—all eyes on house, heaping, tumbledown, a mere shed among bleating sheep and fences. It folds under the weight of our enquiry. A banknote comes out of my wallet, from under the paperweight of my empty stomach, all before our 10 A.M. deadline.

I ring the doorbell. Twice. Three times. I look at you, your tears accrue secretly, your lip issues quivering warning. I bite my own back, my windpipe caught between bricks.

On Saaftingestraat, with baggage in tow, for need and love of bystanders, we stumble into a retirement home. An old lady offers four slices of ham, cheese, tea, and use of a computer. How at peace, how honest, how automatic. I watch you sit in the lobby clutching our bags and staring at your tea as I leave messages with our host.

Soon, a pair of crusty overalls show up in a small, work-horse car with ladder strapped to roof. The driver-side door opens, six screwdrivers roll out onto the pavement—overalls grin, hold door open for us, apologize, bestow the house key, tell a bad joke, eat a lit cigarette. At the house, as our overdue saviour shuts the door behind us, I hear a deep sound, a distant sound—maybe the bones of the house settling—as if something lodged suddenly came unstuck.

The first night. Just the two of us. We spend the evening vacuuming spiders. My phone charger trips the electricity. Can't find the breakers. No power. The fridge is empty. The bathroom is out of toilet paper. We collapse in saddened shapes under a dead lightbulb, overtired and hungry. In bed, love-pull is necessity—we hold on tightly, like we used to. We don't unpack our suitcases.

Half-awake, night divides my darkneses into the marionette shadows of bodies coasting by outside, between hanging blinds, a thin pane of glass separates me from uncertainty, demands my eye-half-open attention. Grief has the rhythm of corrective self-reproach. The rain falls, one hundred thousand metronomes, noise is meaning, life is but a dream. My tired gaze pulls the shadows inside—I heard it said that if darkness is stepped into at the right location and angle, any doubts present on the mind at that time will sunder, spasm, and coil onto themselves until dry. It is cautioned, however, that they are known to regrow gradually by means of sideways speech and inconsistencies in internal dialogue'—

Jolt awake. 4 A.M. I check that you're still beside me. The pillow is moist.  
 “Let's go home,” you whisper.

*maps*

On little remaining battery, I study the transit charts meticulously. We take tramlijn 17 to Centraal Station. Slowly, the hard, unforgiving angles of the Osdorp projects give way to a curious geometry of pavement markings. Rainy boulevards glisten for morning, the city drizzles thick and continuous on the windows of the tram. Streets begin to narrow, motion sharpens, population density rises—smaller cars behave like bicycles, people behave like raincoats. Amstel is sold for scraps. The canals open up, city banners rap in the wind, trams ask you to check out, the buildings lean to get a better look. There are bicycles locked to every railing, to every tree (maybe you black out and wake up in a gracht with six bicycles locked to your extremities?) palpable charge in the air induces a smile on your face,

Centraal is a cold, beautiful explosion;  
 make friends with pigeons,  
 hold my hand, don't get lost.

We pick up a power adapter and some groceries. We charge our phones in a cute cafe on Geldersekaade, steal Wi-Fi, and contact our families. I pick up some beer to share with you. The rest of our selves finally land in Amsterdam; you begin to colour in your words, I no longer strain as hard to hear you past my hunger.

Waiting for the #17 Osdorp de Aker back to the house, you look wistfully down the road; milk carton trams round the corner from Raadhuisstraat onto Nieuwezijds Voorburgwal. There, an Albert Heijn is both overflowing with produce and cracked shopping baskets but also wholly deserted, canvassed with construction tarp, exposing only snowy girders on which both birds and words perch. On the crossing between Magna Plaza and Dam, a long concrete island floats like a longboat atop ceaseless locomotion—your face blurs—I zoom out to get a better impression—memories committed to low-fidelity—the patterned pavement breaks intersecting at angles of destructive interference—bystanders disappear between blinks. In the end, my memory is reduced to the digital glitches in the map I am using to help me write this.

At the house, we discover the breakers in a room hidden behind a bookshelf. We turn the lights on, stock the fridge, and wash our clothes. I open my beer and unpack my headphones. In between hiccups, I notice you holding your book upside down. You go to bed before me. I sit in front of the muted TV for a long while.

Duvel. You clattered in my tourist bag through the rain in Dam, like the soft pinging of a twenty-two inch Byzance ride with rivets. On tramlijn 1 to Osdorp de Aker, when it came time for us to disembark, we did not forget to check out. You taste deep; fretless, you slide between meanings. Snare drum ghost hits like kisses, kisses like ghosts, the cymbal laughs smoky when sizzling, the

overall effect dark, you equally dark, equally tempered, proven to wash as easily, frothing on my tongue; a pregnant high tide, a hidden overtone, a deceptive cadence, an ignored thought, bitter'd. With Brian Blade's blessing, together, we listen to the jazz, to the rain, to the lack of snoring coming from the bedroom. We pull thoughts out from places my arms can reach only on certain kinds of days. We trade fours with Lucifer. We contemplate tectonic shift.

A rabbit carcass decaying in the canal on the other side of the sliding door knocks once, twice against the consciousness, against the roughly hanging sky. Dip finger past the broken skin and into where the organs buckled under the weight of death.

*memory*

A week later, at Lelylaan station, you are two steps ahead of me and do not look back when called by name. You study the departure board, I look down through the hole in my shoe. Words clamber out of my mouth by way of apology and shatter on the platform like dinner plates. You say "OK," and board the correct train.

In Utrecht, a familiar face greets us at the station. A little piece of home. Feet dangling above the canal, the three of us talk. You speak more than you have all trip. The spiral staircase narrows towards the top of the Dom tower. Its sharp point prohibits the rainclouds like a knife to the sky, the sun reigns, a whole dynasty of summer returns and warms the back of our necks. I squint to see more. On every corner below, a street organ tickles dance out of puppets, laughter out of patios. You are asked to take a couple's photograph. At the top of the tower, taking your rain coat off, you are happier than I've seen you in a while.

"You glad we didn't end up flying home early?"

You hold my hand. "Yeah, but I still miss home."

Returning to Osdorp, I have the overwhelming urge to follow the fresh sun out of the city. The clouds are saline over Markermeer lake, heated by reed organ and cymbal blasts. The chord progression falls, I sink like a descending minor scale. I am no more than fifteen kilometers outside of Osdorp listening to Sigur Rós and disintegrating. I'm always out there disintegrating. It's been ten months, but a version of me is still standing out there disintegrating, believe it or not. Hearing the same music today, I can take the song, hold it by its ends and tear it open, gaze through that dimension for a while, and sure enough, there I am, leaning against my bike in the nuclear sun. Wondering. Barred forever from knowing why you're slipping away, yet required to invent.

Osdorperweg narrows upon me, humbled by hooligans on stolen bicycles and hipster Rembrandts driving lemons over limits. I coast behind the street kids as they veer, like us, darting sidelong between imagined obstacles and knocking loudly once, twice against the same thin glass pane of our bed and breakfast, startling your body from between blankets into upright home-sickness. I lean the bike at the door and try to take the key out of the tire lock. It's rusted shut. All things are under the weight of some other thing. Even under the weight of a thousand carnivorous atmospheres, a rabbit carcass can wear that smile, given days.

Here's what I'm thinking as I unlock the door with our only key: pollen, golden hour, a softly strummed major seventh chord carries petrichor into the living room. Past the damp flour smell of the standing water in the bathroom, past the idea of stranded, I imagine our fridge, our leftovers, our space, our rent, taping magazine cut-outs to the wall that we find funny, not all this jetsam, not this four-walled lover's hangover where bookshelves and polystyrene boards mask secret doors. I round the corner and see you in the bedroom, still upright. I contract your

homesickness. Show me the house where home happens! I sit down beside you under the drying clothes hanging from the ceiling. My head is halfway up a starchy pantleg, you smile from a distance of one thousand leagues; my heart is an isosceles triangle too sharp for my ribcage—it falls again to the ground, bouncing once.

I just wanna feed you frites and mayo, y'know? Come get your frites and mayo before this all falls apart. Before we're two cramped seats into our fourteen hour calculated flight through nothing, having solved nothing. Back home, back to not knowing where next to.

I'm coming to get you.

In ushering your literary counterpart from the word-organ (aware of having overstayed her welcome there waiting for me), I noted that she sprang to life fully-grown and mimicking, roughly, the extradiegetic past. She entered into this world on that first night by crying through the pillow to the other side, our side, past the mechanisms of memory, arriving finally at the appropriate terminal. I noticed immediately no electricity; it was her half-ness, such which cannot last long outside of text. I got to work, having little with to keep you. Establishing electricity by the friction and fracturing of words I was finally able to sustain her long enough to ask her questions. I came up against the obstacle of retrospection. I take the same words, mix and remix them, finding memories I never made. That is easy enough to explain. Time passes, memory mishandles itself, rewritten by iterative re-remembering, rendered more and more part of my own particular weather. She gave me summary answers, the circularity of which I should have anticipated. I fast assumed my best 'oh well' attitude and withdrew to share the incandescent low-light with spiders. 'You fucked up little man,' they whispered. 'You waited too long.'

*steps*

As it stands, the stages of grief are

- 1.unlawful touch
- 2.faults and sins are pinned against the sky (vivisection)
- 3.the unwanted (this comes in *waves*)
- 4.dwelling on a taste that's nameless
- 5.love is dead—everything is permitted
- 6.the girl is just a post script in the coroner's investigation

Even with both windows down, the heat in the car is unbearable. I roll the car to a stop, notify you I'm here, get your stuff out of the back seat. You peek out from behind the screen door with a heap of my books and sweaters. I walk up to the fifth step, you look down at me. You've kept busy with school. You spend late nights at the studio, I skip classes early to go home and drum. Our buses leave at different times.

“The whole thing I said about not wanting to talk to you ever... I was way too harsh. It's not really what I mean. I just... I don't know, had a... really bad day.” I look through the hole in my shoe.

“Yeah, we don't have to cut each other out completely. I'm sorry if what I said about growing apart sounded harsh.”

“No, it was fair and true.” Your hair is so long now.

“I just want to stay friends. You're good people.”

I used to want to burn down that house on Osdorperweg for what it's done. What does that say about me?

*once upon a time,*

I was on the edge of sleep, there you were, your thigh over mine, the moon on your jawline, droop glisten lip shirt hiked up to nipples, I remember wanting

nothing more, pulling your shirt past your collarbone and laying my head on your  
breasts breathing words, I would have woken you up, I would have—

let the memory rest.

“Once upon a time” is dangerous—

I think

this hasn't been about the real you for a long time.