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One Line

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One Line

Abstract

In lieu of an abstract, below is the essay's first paragraph.

"She left it sitting on the counter in her tiny bathroom, under the severe glow of the buzzing fluorescent light and reentered her room to find Chris sitting on her purple and blue bedspread, wringing his hands anxiously in his lap."

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MICHELLE GIRARDI

ONE LINE

She left it sitting on the counter in her tiny bathroom, under the severe glow of the buzzing fluorescent light and reentered her room to find Chris sitting on her purple and blue bedspread, wringing his hands anxiously in his lap.

Neither of them made eye contact, which allowed her eyes to wander slowly across the posters hanging on her pale green cinder block walls as if seeing them for the first time. Please one line. Please *one* line, she thought.

Eventually, her eyes guided her back to Chris, who was staring at the floor. Knowing he was a part of this, she went to him and touched his knee. His face didn't flinch, and his expression remained hard as if he couldn't feel her fingertips. Concerned, she reached with her other hand to separate and comfort his, both hot and red with his unconscious rubbing. He ceased his wringing, yet his hand hung limply in hers as if she were touching someone asleep or in a coma. His gaze shifted to the poster on the wall. *Love is only blind until you open your eyes.* She could tell from the unfamiliar vacancy in his eyes that he wasn't really reading it.

She thought of the day she met him, how he had asked her for a piece of paper in American Romantics, and how she'd handed it to him without looking at him, busy concentrating on the Melville lecture. At the end of class, he casually dropped the folded paper on her desk as he left the room. His name. A phone number.

She'd never dated much in high school. She had intended on calling the number and telling him how insulted she was at his pathetic and immature approach to ask her out. When he answered the phone and heard her say his name, she could sense a nervous quiver enter his voice. His pitch raised an octave, and he gave an enthusiastic greeting. No one had ever sounded so happy to hear from her before. For the first time, she found excitement and surprise rendering her speechless. She now understood why her roommate, whom she secretly made fun of, called her boyfriend at least three times a night. It was nice to know that just the sound of her voice could make someone else excited. His affection intrigued her. She agreed to meet him that weekend.

Touching her lips where she had kissed his cheek the night after their date, she felt herself changing into a person in love. Lying in bed, she tried to remember and hold in her nostrils the way his neck smelled—sugary and salty at the same time—when he put his arm around her, the way his eyes always focused directly on hers when he spoke about literature, and the way his forearms flexed as he wrote her number on a napkin.

For the next three years, she'd spent nearly every day with him. Studying.

Watching independent films with her head on his shoulder. Watching him play soccer. Listening to his dreams and aspirations. I'm going to be as big as Hemmingway or Eliot one day, he had said. I'll be published by the time I'm twenty-four, I know it. I'll be a college professor and then travel all over the country and the world to give readings and sign books. I'll be a guest on Larry King and maybe I'll even get to stay at the White House. Wouldn't that be great? I'll be the special guest of the President. We'll get to have dinner with him and you can talk to the first lady and everything.

Now, all she wanted was for him to look at her and reassure her that everything was going to be fine. *It'll be one line, baby, and I'll take care of you forever.* Why wouldn't he say it?

When it was time, she walked toward the bathroom alone, her eyes squeezed shut. This was it. She took a deep breath and stepped inside, looking down quickly to get it over with. Please *one* line. Please.

Back in the room, he picked her up and twirled her around, laughing and smiling. Thank God, baby. It was one line, and now nothing has to change. From now on, we'll just be more careful. I know exactly what I want. The summer after I graduate, Australia. Then graduate school in Europe. Then back to Boston to teach and write. And, of course, you'll come with me. We'll get married as soon as I get my PhD.

He held her close to him. She felt her heart beating against his, filling the silent spaces between his steady thumps. Despite his somber mood all afternoon, she was surprised that even after enduring this experience together, their rhythms weren't syncopated. She swallowed hard and took in the salty-sugary smell one last time. Her eyes were beginning to blur with the strange, salty, stinging tears of loss, yet she could still read the delicate script on the wall. *Love is only blind until you open your eyes.*