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Sometimes I dream myself dead because my ex-boyfriend still loves me. Like the rest of my life has been some kind of dead-man dream and really I stopped living at nineteen on the banks of a lake while the moon lit us up in some silver Hollywood glamour.

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I'm standing at the water's edge and it's running over my toes in red muddy waves, bits of clay getting stuck in the little hairs on my big toes. I don't want to look up again because the last time I did I saw the whiteness of my bones glinting off the water's surface. And I knew they were my own the moment I saw them. I didn't even scream.

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The girl was with her boyfriend in the woods. He had a golf cart. It was that kind of space where he didn't really ask and she didn't really answer, not really, not with words. Inches from inside and a sharp hand grab. That was it. Those moments are really awkward because thirteen is already hard and then there's the sounds of squirrels in the woods watching one kid trying to finger another kid.

It's the kind of story that could go bad really fast, the kind of story everybody already knows about because of course it fucking is.

But I'm not sure that because *it* didn't happen means that it wasn't bad.

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The frogs are all fucking, or looking to get fucked, and I'm listening to it down at the pond. The stars aren't out yet and the sky isn't done setting, but it is mostly purple over the trees now. Mosquitoes keep whispering love poems in my ears; full of my blood, they lay in the crook of an entrance and tell about how much they need me.

My father comes down to the pond and sits down next to me. We both stare at the water where spiders are skating across the surface, mesmerized, or maybe I'm the only one watching. Maybe he isn't even seeing the water, the way the bass lip at the surface.

"He's no good for you, honey. You know that."

I wrap my arms around my legs and rest my chin on my knees. At eighteen, I suddenly feel much smaller.

"Your mother told me about the way he spoke to you last week, and I almost didn't let you go on that trip. But you have to see it."

"I told mom to let me handle it, and I did." I mumble out and begin to pick at the pinestraw around me. First take the dried pointed end and stick it into the dead layers of flesh of my fingertips until it hurts and then break it down one piece at a time.

My father snatches the straw from my hands and tells me to look at him.

"You love him?" When I nod my head slowly, embarrassed for some reason to know my father knows I love he continues, "Tell me why."

I clear my throat, confused and suddenly terrified.

"What?"

My father has always been good in an argument. The best way to win an argument is to be the one in the argument with no care for what you're arguing about. I'm not. I shake and my throat closes and I can't see in the periphery anymore.

"It's not a hard question. I asked you why you loved him."

I can feel my vision beginning to go and I am so embarrassed and angry and

"Who could even answer a question like that? Why do *you* love mom?"

And this is the wrong tactic because my father is good in an argument. He doesn't ask questions he didn't already answer himself just in case.

"She's smart, she's strong, she cares about other people, she works harder than anyone else I know, she's creative. I can keep going. But that isn't the question. See, you can't even come up with an answer to why you love him. And if you can't come up with reasons right now, then that means something is wrong."

I'm pushing my fingertips into each other, and I know he can see it. And that he can see it for what it is. He was the one who taught me about it in the first place. About body language and how people can manipulate you just by observing the way you hold your body in a confrontation. And yet, this knowledge does nothing for me when faced with it.

"I have a lot of reasons."

My father laughs and shakes his head. He stands up and wipes the dirt away from his jeans and lights up a cigarette, the glowing red end bright in the now almost dark.

"Okay, here's the deal. He's disrespectful of you, and he disrespected your mother. I'm not saying you have to break up with that boy but I don't want him on this property again. Come inside, soon. Before you get eat up."

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Sometimes, while I'm in the middle of being fucked, my husband will press his sweaty stomach onto my own and grab my jaw to whisper in my ear, *I love this pussy*. And while I know it's true it's hard to believe because I don't. I never have.

Sometimes, not while being fucked but after, sometimes I remember when I was thirteen and I'm back in that golf cart and it's not silent except between the two of us and it's not even four in the afternoon and too bright outside.

"Wait! I just," my voice is shaking and I don't think you're supposed to be scared. "I just want to say first that I'm... different."

"What do you mean?" His voice is angry, coming from right over my shoulder where I'm sitting on his lap, my body twisted unnaturally so that I'm not actually sitting my full weight on him, twisted so that his hand doesn't slide the last inch down and touch me.

I grab his hand and try to pull it back a few more inches but he isn't moving.

"I just... I don't know," I'm pulling at his hand again and this time he moves it a little. I can feel how red my face is and I'm literally out in the open. In the woods with a boy's hand down my popped open jeans. "I don't know, just different."

"What, do you have like a dick?" He laughs at his own words and it barks across the space between trees.

I pull my body away completely and sit next to him in the cart fumbling with my button, fingers shaking too hard to get it through the first three tries.

"I just don't think I'm ready." I say, and know instantly that it's true.

He glares at me and takes us back to his house in silence. When we get back he watches Gundam Wing and yells at his mother to fix him an egg and cheese sandwich. I wait for my mother to get there and sit on the opposite side of the couch with my hands in my lap.

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My skeleton is turning red. I'm sinking into the mud around us. Listening to him tell me about how he loves me. How this is the only way he would never consider it to be cheating.

"Do you love her?"

He turns to look at me and he is wearing my own skin. Stretched across his own face my lips widen into a smile.

"I say that."

And we're both laughing under the moon.

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