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## TOURIST

THIS IS WHAT A BOY SMELLS OF WHEN YOU WAKE UP IN HIS BED. Sweat: his, yours, and others', from the dancing, the fucking, and the crowd at the show last night. Stale deodorant: his. Beer: who knows, probably both of yours. Hairspray: yours. Sticky smells, unexpected smells, smells that remind you of the fact that you're lying next to a stranger. But there's something else, too—a scent that isn't coming from him. Something faint but rotten. There's no point in mentioning this to the boy—I call him a boy, but I shouldn't. He's a man, although, to be fair, a very young one—at least a handful of years younger than I am. And I'll be gone soon, so why leave him with words about how his home smells bad to my foreign nose? I'm just a tourist in his city, in his bed. I say this to him with a smile instead of bringing up the unpleasant smell, and he argues, sweetly, that I'm not a tourist, that I'm here to work, and there's truth in that, of course. But I still feel that my work is a bit like tourism, sapping my time, energy, and money, as it usually generates little more than a per diem you blow through quickly and, if you're lucky, an equally fleeting dopamine hit from the high of the show. For work I stand on a stage with three other people and look out at a crowd that never seems to notice I'm looking back at them, that always seems to think I'm looking past their faces at some distant, gleaming world that only my friends and I can see because we're three feet above them, bathed in light and playing instruments. They rarely seem to realize that I am really looking back at them, trying to understand their lives. I was doing this with particular focus last night, this time scanning their faces for someone I'd like to go home with because earlier in the evening we'd arrived at the night's Airbnb and there had only been a double and a twin instead of the queen and two twins we'd been promised. Micah and Jack, drums and bass, brothers, always share in situations like this, but Benny and I are no longer in the habit of sleeping together, and, even if we were, a twin bed wouldn't quite cut it. So I'd offered to step out for the night—felt excited, actually, to have an excuse to get away

from my bandmates' snores and farts for a while and to possibly enjoy a nice screw while I was at it. When I proposed this, Benny started to give me a look, but I denied him the chance to complete it, turning away to grab just the necessities for a night out from my suitcase—a pair of underwear, some condoms—and stuff them into my purse. I spun to catch the door before it swung shut behind Jack, who was already lighting a cigarette and squinting into the bright winter sunlight, scanning the frigid terrain of this sad city for something, anything, interesting to look at while he smoked his way to our soundcheck. Later, from the stage, I did the same—searched the landscape of bobbing heads until I found something that caught and held me: the figure of a tall boy with curly hair and a smooth, open face, wearing suspenders that I'd snap as I undressed him later that night. I took him home to his home, or at least that's how it felt, like I was leading the way even as his feet were directing us to his building, his apartment, and his bed.

We wake early, and since he doesn't work until the afternoon, and we have a few hours before the band is due to pick me up in the van and whisk me off to our next tour stop, I keep him in bed with me. The sex is better now that we're both sober, though it's still a little too tender and sweet for me. Afterwards he takes me out to a greasy diner that I can tell he considers to be a special place and that he thinks will be an exciting experience for me. As we criss-cross the city's flat streets, full of snow beneath a shockingly wide, blue sky, I struggle to inhale the cold. My lungs have been getting weaker over the last few years from all the singing, screaming, and smoking, and I have to gulp the frigid air to get enough of it. And with my deep, gaping breaths I can't help but inhale the air's scent. This is how a boy's city smells at the tail end of a bitter winter: of sunlight, salt, ice, and the same stench you'd first smelled waking up that morning in his apartment, only much, much stronger. It's an entirely new scent to me, but he doesn't seem to notice it, so I pull my scarf up over my face and nuzzle my hand into the crook of his elbow, trying to pretend that I don't either. To fill the silence and offset the boredom that's already creeping up on me, I pretend that I belong in this city, with him, clutching his arm and gasping at the air like a fish. I pretend that I didn't simply slip in upon the wind and won't slip back out in a few hours, leaving nothing of myself behind. When we're finally tucked into the diner he tells me how last night, drunk, I'd rambled—my word, not his—about a girl I'd known in high school who had been from this city and

who had moved to my own small town in the next province over before coming back with her parents after just a year because of problems she'd had at our high school. I'd told him how I wondered if she still lived here and how this girl had always smelled of a musky jasmine scent that I had never forgotten and that I could still conjure at will somewhere in the space between my imagination and my nostrils. As he speaks, I remember not my drunken rambling but the girl's scent. In a sea of teenagers dousing themselves with powdery Dove deodorants, nose-invading Axe body sprays, and cheap Miss Dior Cherie knock-offs, she had smelled like a distant, hazy garden inhaled through a screen of smoke. I laugh off his request that I tell him more about the girl, but he looks, in a polite, unaggressive way, like he might suspect what's beneath my changing of the subject. I don't say that I had bullied her like everyone else, when the occasion had called for it, even though, in truth, I had liked her and wanted to be friends with her. I don't tell him that she had always been kind to me in a hopeful, heartbreaking way, even after I had been awful to her, and that this sweetness had only made me want to be more cruel. Instead, I laugh, shake my head, and sip my black coffee as my phone vibrates on the table. It's always Micah who calls when it's bad news, and sure enough the van is in the shop. Before he can get out more than his greeting and this news, I hear someone approach him, kicking their way through the snow on the other end of the line. Benny's voice laughs bitterly into the phone, saying that he told them to plug the van in, *It was so fucking cold last night*. Then Micah again, explaining that the van needs a new part, which has to be ordered from another province. It will probably take a few days, and we will probably miss the next two shows unless we rent a van and swing back to pick up ours at the end of the tour. I say we can't afford that, and Micah agrees. He offers to buy a blow-up mattress for the Airbnb so I don't have to sleep out again, but I look at the boy, smiling into his menu, his left knee jiggling, and after a moment I tell Micah there's no need, I'll stay put, and to call me when the van is ready. I give him the boy's address for the pick up. Micah asks if I'm sure, and I hear a hurried crunch of snow as Benny approaches him again, this time saying, *What? What's she doing?* I hang up and smile at the boy, who smiles eagerly back.

I don't ask his real name, but he calls himself *lucky*, and so do I. He learned mine from Benny that first night as he introduced the band from his place centre stage at the end of the set—first Jack, then Micah, then me.

When it was my turn to be named, I found the boy's face once again in the crowd, and when he cheered sweetly for me I smiled back and knew I had him. After I share Micah's news, the boy lets his spoon fall into his coffee and invites me to stay for two days, three, a week, *forever*. He laughs sarcastically over the last offer, but nevertheless there's an eager excitement in his eyes. Back in his home he tucks me into a nest of blankets on his ratty old couch and leaves for work, shouting over his shoulder that the spare key is by the door, then naming a few places nearby to eat and grab coffee, in case I feel like wandering out. I stay for a while after he leaves, entertaining myself by scrolling through my phone and peeking through his things—he has everything you'd expect a boy in his early twenties to have, from a predictable vinyl collection to no proper laundry hamper to mismatched dishes and sheets—but it's not long before I'm restless, ready to move. I wonder, briefly, about the guys, but find I don't really want to call them and find out what they're doing, what they're looking for, or what they've found. I could probably guess, anyway. At every stop on the tour each of us seeks something. In some places it's an item of clothing in a vintage shop, in others it's some planned experience, like a cheesy excursion to a snake pit or a roller rink we'd read about in a sad *Top Ten Things to Do In [City]* list as we sailed into town. I usually look for women—not in the same way as Benny or Jack, who often look for a fuck, but in the way that a woman sometimes craves other women, especially after having settled herself firmly, like I had long ago, in the camp of the “guy's girl.” Sometimes I want to prove that I could have female friendships, if I wanted them, so I strike up fast, fleeting ones with women who play in the opening band, bartend at the venue, or want to sleep with Benny or Jack—or Micah, before they realize he's gay. I charm these women easily, but I also feel relief when it's time to leave, and I never text the numbers they give me. I leave behind a trail of almost-friendships, frozen in icy conception. That is what I'm looking for when I leave the boy's apartment, and as I walk I pretend again that I live here, in his city. I try to make my uncertain path to the café he'd mentioned look intentional, purposeful, cutting fluid, diagonal paths across the snowy, grimy streets. The same stench from earlier continues to invade my nostrils, and when I enter the coffeeshop and see a friendly-looking barista at the till, I resolve both to test my ability to blend in, to be a local, and to find out what's causing the smell. I approach the counter and try a tactic of nonchalant connectivity, fusing my outsider wires to her insider ones and sapping their juice without

her knowing. *Stinks outside again*, I say, certain that she'll smile, agree, and reveal the source of the smell, without realizing that I don't know it. Then she'll ask what I'm up to today, we'll chat, and I'll leave her wanting more. Instead, she nods coolly—no smile—and asks for my order. She drinks in my outfit with a cold expression that I choose to interpret as praise.

In bed that night I ask what this city's words are, and the boy smiles, confused, struggling to guess what I want him to say. It's a game that Benny started years ago, back when the band was brand new and quickly approaching what would turn out to be the peak of our success, and that we still play in the van as we spin away from whatever city or town we're leaving, especially if we all parted ways there, for a time, as we occasionally do, and are only in that moment coming back together to share our dispatches. Each stop gets a few words, usually six or so—more if it's made an impact, fewer if it's a place we know we'll soon forget. The words must be arranged like two lines of a poem, and the final word of each line must rhyme. It makes the place easier to remember and thus easier to categorize when we reminisce on it much later on, usually in mocking tones. The boy asks what my words for myself are, which I've never thought of before, so I give him a clutch of safe, untruthful ones. He gives me his for himself, and they're earnest, goofy, easy to trust—just like him. He stumbles over his rhyming words and ends up blurting out *tight* and *flight*. I try not to laugh, but then he does, and we giggle together. Something like relief or ease floods to my fingertips and toes. I raise my hand to his brow, and he goes quiet. My thumbnail purples as I press my thumb to his forehead—a line down, a line across. He asks if I've blessed him, and I smile, take a cookie from the package between us, and plop it onto his tongue. He chews it with his mouth open, still smiling, wafting buttery vanilla fumes my way. This is what it smells like when you touch a sweet boy sweetly.

On the second day of the van being broken, the second day of waking up in the boy's bed, Benny calls me three times, and I answer once, missing the first, very early call—Benny is notorious for never sleeping and hating when others do—but waking to the second. I picture him sitting diagonally in a chair in the Airbnb, his legs crossed over each other and his arms draped over his legs, a cigarette dangling exactly like you'd expect it to in the hand of someone like him: languidly, arrogantly, threatening to fall at any minute

from between his pointer and middle fingers and set everything around him alight. He updates me on the van (it should be ready the day after tomorrow) and on Micah and Jack (Jack said something to piss Micah off, and now Micah is sleeping on the tiny love seat in the living room instead of in the comfortable bed with his brother). I hang up when, exhaling his smoke, he dons his most sarcastic voice and asks how *that boy* is, and I know exactly what he's trying to do. I ignore my phone as it immediately lights up again, showing Benny's face, and turn instead to the boy, who is standing in the kitchen, carefully preparing a bowl of cereal for me with the exact amount of milk I'd requested. It's amazing how quickly two people can learn each other, if they're willing to try. When we're not fucking, eating, or wandering the streets with my arm tucked into his, he tells me about his life, lived entirely in this city, and I, remembering my slip-up that first night, when I'd shared too much, tell him nothing substantial of mine, lived entirely elsewhere and nowhere at all. He tells me about growing up in this icy maze and about moving to smaller and smaller homes every few years instead of the bigger and bigger ones his mother always promised. The first move had been particularly hard on her—the sale of the small house by the river that they'd inherited from his grandparents, the move into the two-bedroom apartment on the bleak edges of the city. When they'd sold the house, the realtor had let slip that the family who bought it would be tearing it down but not for a few weeks or perhaps months, and his mother had continued to creep into the yard late at night at least once a week, her sleepy son in tow, to tend to the roses that her own mother had planted there when she was a child. He tells me he can still remember the roses' scent—*just like you can remember your friend's musky jasmine*, he says. This is the smell of memory's favourite trick, haunting you through the years. I wince at *friend*, but he moves on, not noticing my expression or not letting me see that he does. He says he can also remember the sound of his mother crying when finally, one night, they had come to the house and found it reduced to mulch. At this I fold him into me, and we have his kind of sex—gentle, intense, kissy—and I'm surprised by how much I enjoy it. After, as we share a cigarette with the window open, the stench from outside wafting in, stronger than ever, I finally ask him what the smell is. He inhales, thinks, and says, *It's the smell of mushrooms from the mushroom plant. The whole city smells like that sometimes. I guess I've stopped noticing it.* He smiles and moves to shut the window, but I stop him, pull him to me, cover him in kisses, and sniff him all

over like a hound.

We tumble into a routine. He fucks me (still eagerly and a little uncertainly, but not unpleasantly—no, not unpleasantly), feeds me (cereal in the mornings, pasta at night), leaves me in his bed (rickety wooden Ikea frame), and goes to work (at The Body Shop in the mall, selling soaps, lotions, and a variety of other sweet-smelling liquids to middle-aged women and their daughters), living his life with and without me. I sleep, wander, and live his life with and without him. I inhabit his home and his streets, some of his clothes, and through those his smell. Three days is long enough to take on another's scent, I learn, at least until the next time you bathe, and I don't shower once in the three days I'm in his home. I really ought to—after all that screwing—but I find myself reluctant. I pee seven times, shit twice, brush my teeth with his toothbrush morning and night. My body starts to feel like a body that belongs in his home, and I find that I'm shockingly comfortable in his life. On the afternoon of the third day, I nestle into his couch and take a nap—something I almost never feel relaxed enough to do. As I sleep, I dream of running into Benny in the street and discovering that he lives here now, too. I dream of the boy feeding me Lucky Charms high up in a bird's nest. But mostly I dream of the girl I knew in high school and her heady jasmine scent. I dream of finding her tucked into a house made of snow and knocking on its icy door to deliver cookies baked in my own oven in my own home down the street. When she opens the door, I see that inside her house is a garden bursting with starry white blossoms. I want so badly to enter, to swim in the scent of all those blooms, but when she sees me standing there she takes the cookies from my hands and turns me out into the city, which smells everywhere of rotting mushrooms and seems incapable of hosting a scent like jasmine.

He loves that I was born on Halloween. He loves what he calls my *strong* body and my *comforting* hands. He loves a joke I make over breakfast on the third day. He loves *that* and *this* and *these* and *that*. Four loves in three days, and I feel ready for the van, its smells of burps and farts, and all of us cackling. But that night, the last night, I nevertheless find myself imagining what it would mean to stay. I envision a routine rolling out in front of me, unfurling into a runner that extends the length of the apartment's hallway, down the stairs, out to the street, and into a little shop nearby where per-

haps I work regular hours and know the names of all the customers. This runner continues on, across the city, splitting off into a hundred branches that snake into a dozen homes—the homes of friends who love me and to whom I bring bouquets of fresh flowers from my own garden—as well as supermarkets, doctors' offices, bakeries, parks, and every place that a person who belongs somewhere would frequent. I start to imagine what Benny, Micah, and Jack would say if I told them I was quitting the band to stay here with this boy and start a real life—if I finally brought about the end that we all know is coming faster than we'd like to admit, lurking in the distance, speaking in our mothers' voices, calling us home. I push those thoughts away as I hear the boy walking down the hall, home from work. When he reaches the bedroom and sees me, he stops and grins in a happy, blushing way that's becoming familiar. I haven't told him, can't seem to tell him, that Micah called and that the van will be ready tomorrow. The boy sits on the bed beside me and without any ceremony hands me a little black bag. I remove the tissue paper inside to find a small glass vial of oil with The Body Shop's logo stamped in black across its front. When I open it, the room is filled with deep, musky jasmine—the exact jasmine from my memory. For the briefest moment I'm finally ready to stay, and somehow that moment stretches out for several hours, until he's dozed off—tired from waking and fucking and working and fucking again—and I'm finally shaken from my dozy thoughts of gardens by the sound of gunshots outside. Fearful, I'm about to wake the boy up when I notice a spiky red glow upon his sleeping back. Looking to the window, I realize it's not gunshots I'm hearing but fireworks—and not just a few of them set off in someone's backyard but dozens of them, huge ones, set off over and over in the distance. I wrack my brain, trying to think of what holiday they could possibly be celebrating at this time of year. I nudge the boy awake and ask him, but he just opens an eye, lifts his head, smiles drowsily at the window and the lights, as if they're familiar, comforting, expected, and falls back to sleep. I watch the distant pops of sizzling colour for what feels like hours, with my wrist at my nose, trying to understand as I inhale the scent this boy plucked from my past and bottled for my parting present.

This is what a boy smells of when you wake up in his bed. Sweat: his and yours. Cum: his. Musky jasmine: yours. When he kisses you goodbye, you smell all of this, but still you don't tell him that you'll be gone when he



returns. This boy touches your hair and kisses your head like he'll do this every day for the rest of your lives. This boy—surely I should be calling him a man by now, surely he's earned that—touches you for the last time but doesn't know it. He leaves, and you try to feel ready for that to be the last you see of him. I give myself one minute of quiet peace, his lingering smell mingling with the scent he made specially for me, before I jump into his shower and wash it off—him, the scent, these days of trying on a new life. When I return to his bedroom, damp and clean, my phone vibrates in its spot next to the bottle of scent on the bedside table. It's Benny calling to say they're outside and to come out, come out, wherever I am. I grin in spite of everything, slip my phone into my pocket, gather my scattered belongings into my purse, don my clothes, and leave without a second look. I hop into the van, settle into my usual spot next to Benny in the back, and smile at Micah in the driver's seat and Jack beside him. With a roar from Benny we spin away from the city, and it's hours or maybe just a moment later that I notice the green of the van's digital clock glowing in the darkness, the smell of Micah's coffee coming to me from the front seat mixed with stale body odours of every variety. Jack grumbles sleepily that we really need to get the van cleaned on the next stop. Benny looks over at me and smiles when he sees that I'm awake. He takes off his hoodie and arranges it into a nest-like cushion in my lap. He rests his head there, closes his eyes, and then, like he's been waiting a long time to do so, asks me for my words for the city we've just left. I pause for what feels like the space of three days. I think briefly of the vial of scent, still sitting where I left it by the boy's bed. Finally, I offer *boy, jasmine, lucky, tight, mushrooms, body, fireworks, flight*. When I finish, I see surprise—or maybe fear—register briefly in his popped-open eyes, before he closes them again and smiles, nuzzling into the “V” of my belly-crotch-tops-of-thighs. He says they're good words, and goes easily to sleep. I look down at him for a long moment before inhaling deeply, noticing a distant, sweet scent mingling faintly with the sour smells that live in the van. I look out the window, thinking of what's next. We're already so far from that cold, smelly town—the city that invented flatness and uncorked the colour blue to fill its half-globe sky. Now that we've skipped two stops on the tour, we're bound for a place that touches the ocean—a place whose rolling green hills glow golden and ready for me in my mind's eye. I'll slip into that city, which knows only my clean surface, and everything will be new.