

psyche

Somebody once told me that each time we remember something, our memory is not of the event itself. Rather, we only remember the prior reimagining. Then, each time we revisit that memory, it becomes less of a lens for us, and more of a mirror. A sort of rebuilding. Like Theseus's ship, but why should we only replace the rotting planks? What if we replace the planks that squeak as we walk over them, or the planks stained by alcohol, or the planks with nicks in the wood, from when we threw ourselves to the floor and breathed bloody air into each other's mouths? Is it still Theseus's ship if we changed it simply because we *wanted to*?

I'm trying to picture a few days ago, when you told me you *couldn't do this anymore*. Funny, you said it in the corner of the café we always sat in when ordering breakfast. You used to say such pretty things in that booth, preaching in the morning while the light sucked shadows from your skin: *Poetry and music must be close for either to be really well done. We must imagine Sisyphus not happy but persistent. You could be so smart if you'd only speak a little more*. That would make me laugh, and then I couldn't say anything at all.

Your face smudges now. You were mad, at first, and then I thought you might be afraid, and then I saw a tiredness that melted you into your seat. I wished you would rage. I wished you would color brilliantly, your teeth flashing, your eyes burning bottomless. When you got angry, your vision narrowed like a bull's. I would wave my red-flag mouth and watch you become blind to everything but me, and that felt *good*.

I confess— I am no great craftsman. I cannot make these fragments more than they are. But let me take Theseus's ship up in my hand; let me brush my fingers over the wave-battered beams and feel those familiar dips before they are sanded down. Three nights: three pieces. That can be enough.

The first night is battered, splintered through. In every way I can picture it, it comes down to the same thing.

You wait outside the bar to catch me at the bottleneck. We are healthily drunk, and our words are meaningless, acrid, spewing into the dark. You reach for your hair and pull as your inhibition gives like rotten wood.

At times like this I wonder: do you hate me?

When you press your shaking hands into my skin, whispering curses against my lips, I know the answer does not matter.

We bruise each other. We tug at fraying strings. We say: *I will meet you at your worst*. You leave your shirt at my apartment, and I use it to wipe my floors clean of the mud you track in.

The second night fractures in the middle.

As you sleep, you curl to the left side, shielding your chest with the pledge of a palm. I watch you rise, and fall, and rise, and rock. *There*: I want to pick out your thoughts from the quiet of your face. The curve of your cheek, the crease of your brow— I coax them into meaning.

Despite what I may surmise, you are not much more than your body. I know *that* well. I have seen a great deal of you, pushed up against my bathroom sink, with one eye always on the mirror.

Something in my form caves as I watch you sleep, dying flowers in a gale. In quiet moments, I cannot help being weak. I have opened myself and become raw where I should have been rough. My fingers twitch out, trying to leave a touch that is soft.

Starting, you roll over slightly, eyelids cracked open. You are not fully awake, but you gather impressions of the room. Of me, bending over you, one hand outstretched.

At times like this I wonder: do you see me?

When you shift back into place, disappearing into yourself again, my hand drops. I feel shame. I have done something awful, or something awful has happened, and I have not been able to stop it.

I think you know what comes after. We gain momentum, and as we hurtle towards an inevitable, we spark and catch fire, burning out in a coffee shop sometime in the morning. The final bruises are exchanged, parting gifts for voyages to opposite ends of the world.

Let me give you my final piece. I have been selfish with this one, but no longer.

Do you remember the last night you cooked dinner in my house, three weeks out from the end? You spilled chicken broth over my counter; you let the water boil into the stove grate while trying to explain the mysteries of the universe to me. You said to *put some actual goddamn music on, none of that electronic crap*, and I told you how pretentious you were and did it anyways. It was that song about the girl named after the drink, and I knew it was right when I saw your eyes light up with prideful pleasure. I sat on my stool and watched you dance around my kitchen, absorbed in yourself.

For a second, I wished my house faced east, not west. I wanted you to turn around and face me. I did not want to wonder anymore; I wanted to stand up and place my hand under your sternum, where your ribs split. We needed to change in that moment. We needed to stop seeking out our faults. We needed to be good to each other.

You looked back, drops of broth falling from your spoon and crashing to the floor. You asked: *what are you thinking?*

I cannot see your face in my mind's eye. Too many times, that memory has been passed over. You watch me, I suppose, and it is not enough. I answer: *nothing in particular*. We find our burden again, continuing up our mountain.

Imagine that one day, I learn to disregard the past. When I come looking for you, you are full, and you have not tasted bitter for ages.

I am sweet as well, and still foolish. We have hurt each other. Still, I ask you to imagine us happy.

One question remains: do you listen to me?