

An Impossible Time

Some days, I wake up and notice the waste everywhere: small, confined, yet overflowing. I patter around, collecting markers of use. Dregs of coffee and used tea bags; snipped clothing tags and unopened bank statements and stained receipts. The sweaters that are neither dirty nor fresh, draped sullenly over desk and chair. I ask myself: Would washing them be a waste of time? I frown at Dylan's favorite pair of chino shorts, crumpled on the floor, battered. I rearrange stuff, then rearrange again. I consider the time I spend running or driving or washing dishes while listening to music. Music instead of thinking, instead of working through my own thoughts—is that a waste? On weeknights, I'm usually sleepless after 12; on weekends, I always sleep like the dead—are those hours wasteful? There are the interminable minutes of small talk and the long moments between spoken sentences: there are those incomplete thoughts you speak aloud, then immediately wish you hadn't. There are minimums and maximums everywhere, especially for the number of hours that can be fruitfully used and the number that can be *used up*—simply to exist. There are the useless comments; there are the poisonous clichés. "It is what it is." It is what it isn't, I tell myself, with rising anxiety. It's not what you or I think.

Everything repetitive, everything standardized, everyone expectant and demanding attention—it's either your emotion over logic, or your logic over emotion.

Years ago, I had dreams that distorted real-life scenes from before Dylan and I were together. We were always overexposed, awash in midday sunlight; I was standing in front of him with his arms around my waist, or leaning against him as he sat, casually chatting to someone. I dreamt of a romantic nonchalance we hadn't quite had yet, as though I could will it into being. I would wake up uneasy, aching for a time in the future when I wouldn't worry about wasting time. When I wouldn't feel unsure, or unsettled. An impossible time, when every moment would feel like part of a chain of larger meaning and connection.

I didn't feel like myself. I had started to sleep erratically, lose track of time, eat without pattern. I was always trudging across campus to an 11 PM party, or pulling an all-nighter in the library, or texting about a mysterious conversation overheard in the next room. I was always in the mood to listen to indie music until 3 and wake up at 8 and stare down uneasily into the sticky residue of a wine glass. I avoided confronting time in the hopes of avoiding discomfort about it.

Yet I can say that I do feel like myself, these days. I'm in a different sort of mode, and it's strangely comfortable. I smile in the mirror at the crease that forms on my cheek, after sleeping face-planted into the mattress. I think about distance: from so many tumultuous years, months, weeks, nights. I wake up on most days now, good or bad, and roll over, pressing my face into Dylan's back, feeling his breath expand and contract. We're alive. As my sister once said, *What could be sweeter?* For a moment, I can almost convince myself: there's no need to hustle. No more collapsing ceiling tiles. No more bullshit. No more tears.

The anniversaries of my sister's death—and her birthday, each year—still hasten me along, prompting anxiety and contrition about time. But with Dylan I feel fundamentally distant from my old world. I have a reassuring sense of permanence without particularity. I don't need to always anticipate. And, I've always enjoyed the certain vulnerability that the Upper Valley

demands of me. The punishing cold and that middle-of-nowhere feeling bring out a bit of shrewdness, a bit of frankness. After all, we had to be a little vulnerable and a little shrewd to create this new, tiny world in our first apartment together.

Today, grimaces feel more like the beginning of laughter. I slip in and out of ease and unease, rather than lingering in a state of melancholy. *Wasting time* has begun to lose some of its meaning.