

small fortunes

April 3rd, GOODS show  
After GOODS  
new years pt 2  
new years pt 1  
Mr. X & Ms. Y [narrative center 1]  
Uggie text  
petals in the shower  
Nicki/Ricky cvs + Dick @ the bus [narrative centerpiece 2]  
petals & pizza  
the pARTy [narrative centerpiece 3]  
I thik I lov u  
Mom & Malik  
Petals wants to quit  
Ken and the Park [narrative centerpiece 4]  
Ken and the Tape  
Ken and the Beach  
Suburbanists  
Skul  
Balln for therapy  
Olaf coordinating  
Petals & the dog  
Risk & two phone calls  
New Years pt 3  
Texting for clarification  
\*a dream\*  
Dinner w Ricky  
An afternoon w Leigh  
Friday I'm not in love  
Emporium  
Octagon  
Saturday...

I sing her a song as we walk back up the street. I have purple glitter on my face. Today, someone at work told me purple means strength; I've rolled that around in my head like candy all day, hoping to suck some from it.

I give her the line: "So you know I'm not really on hiatus..." her big eyes get bigger, her small lips curl all the way into her widening mouth "Ohhhh shit!" We play coy. I tell her that after the break-up, on the first morning of spring, I woke up at work, humming a melody on a locker room bench. I kept singing, words came, and in minutes I had written a song, my first since the hiatus began, that I now knew I needed to sing to her.

'I wanted you bad, I needed me first. I been finding ways to move. I heard the love call, I responded in kind; I been finding ways to move.'

After 'I am coming back,' and a melodic "oh," it's all over. I feel a weight lifted from my chest. I tell her as much. She says, "First off," that it's a really great song, and second that she appreciates me singing it to her. I grumble in my head 'You didn't like it. You don't understand how brilliant it is. If you did we would be dating right now.' I've thought about her love and desire for my art being connected with her waning affection for me. My shit was the Hulk, now it's a nerd in torn clothes. It used to be a lodestar.

We play around on the train platform, I'm wonderfully numb and just happy to be with her. Her name is Leigh, by the way. And she is a full, infinite celestial being, more than a body I desire, a relationship, a pronoun, a chapter. Just like you. Leigh and I ride the train, me joking and smiling and listening, waiting for my friend to snap back into the reality where I am the one and only. It never comes, she is polite and cool and beautiful. The train goes into Pilsen, right to the corner of her and Liv's apartment. I've reasoned with her that it's not an inconvenience to ride with, I can get home just fine taking the bus from there: my crib is super accessible coming from downtown. "But also, I'm not ready to go back to being alone." She nods.

I mention the GOODS album release show at the Subterranean tonight. Leigh's big eyes get big, "You're missing that for me?" I shrug. I just showed her the GOODS song with Pierce on it, "Rise Above," a few weeks ago. I remember, it was snowing that night. A couple of years ago that song was the last nail in my coffin of fronting on Pierce and no matter how famous he gets it's all just an excuse for me to get people to listen to that one joint: the most gorgeous, fly, bittersweet soul ballad in the entire West.

Leigh waits with me at the bus stop across from the Pink Line station, kiddy corner to her apartment. We're standing in front of a bar; I introduce myself to some people on its stoop. A month ago, I came there for the first time and met the owner. He and I talked about his plans to open a restaurant connected to the establishment, he told me that I was a lucky man and

that Leigh absolutely could not stop talking good things about me. He said he wasn't afraid of being broke, called her brilliant and "sexy to boot," I tried to deflect it non-confrontationally, and felt sickened. Somewhere in there he made a joke about being "special," dropping his voice and sticking his tongue between his teeth. Leigh confronted him. She said she was in special education for most of her educational career. The owner had been too. The owner or someone asked me if I was signed or something; they had all heard my shit in the aftermath of Leigh's Me party. I probably said some shit about unconvention.

The bus comes and I never see that bar again. I realize I can probably make it in time for at least part of the GOODS show. Even if it's just 10 minutes, I'm so wound up it would be worth it. I pay ten dollars and, fortunately for me, as I walk in GOODS happen to be playing a *different* song about getting over a broken relationship. From the black of the back, I can hear Majila coo about being the whole damn pizza (Not just a slice!!) inside of Theo's ached, heavy bass. The first person I see when I enter the crowd area, standing in a circle of people, is Pierce. He is warm, "Good to see you," I step on his toes stumbling into a hugshake, remembering, always remembering, that he overtly ignored me during high school. It's good to see him too.

I play the back, dizzy with emotion, knowing that Ricky has to be here. Probably in the front, with the whole ACP crew. She still hasn't responded to my week-old text to reconnect; I don't want to be a shadow on her night+life. Can't deal with my shame and frustration. And yet, here I am. And yet, when Peter spots me a little bit of a ways back and motions me to the front to where the crew is congregated, I come.

GOODS, formerly The Goods (Presumably changed for copyright/Googleability purposes), plays jam after jam. And what I need, this night, is to see one of my favorite bands, two of my favorite friends, playing some of my favorite music ever- black, poppy, heartbreaking, affirming. I need to dance, and sing, and be taken away and amazed and proud. I do all of those things. No less, this show is a big deal! GOODS as a b(r)and are steadily reaching "namedrop" status even outside of our community, are touring, have a manager, were just on *Spin and* Okayplayer this morning. So it's packed. And somehow, I wind up standing next to Ricky the entire night. We call out to the stage, let our mouths hang under tight eyes, throw our hands up, snap our spines and wrists into the groove. Lose and find ourselves in the crowd the way only we two (seemed to be) do(ing). And she doesn't look at or speak to me once. (Real shit)

Uggie, royalty in the All-City Poetry clique, who is also not speaking to or looking at me, disappears from our circle momentarily only to return dragging Pierce by his wrist to see Ricky. Maybe Pierce didn't want to be seen. Regardless, Pierce and Ricky have mad love and it's great watching a former rival and a former lover embrace with overwhelmed sincerity directly in front of me while ditties about self-love and acceptance ring out.

'*What the fuck is this,*' I think.

There is a passage in *Everything is Illuminated* where the light from all of the lovers making love all over the planet can be seen from space, turning Earth into a disco ball of spiritual ascendance. I think of that image, look around me, gather my feelings, and send a beam out through space & time for my future self to catch. I make it a checkpoint of sorts, and when I have teleported forward into a place that isn't this night of reckoning and exes and sad songs and quiet drama it will be such a bemusing snapshot.

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24 texts me "It's Olaf's birthday." I never respond.

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I think I see Olaf riding his bike near my apartment. It scares me. 24 says "That sounds about right."

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I'm on CTA Bus Tracker before I even get up from my seat. I hurry from class to the stop: tonight is the GOODS' listening party. It started at 7. Class isn't over til 6:55. I wonder if Ricky will be there, if it will be fucked up seeing her. I ride the bus with a conflicted consternation of being an artist on the way to a room full of art & artists when there's drama in the air to distract from and enhance every little thing. At least, maybe I can have some nice conversation with friendly faces. At least, I have an excuse to see Ricky.

I get to the white door of the apartment and hear the music vibrating out. I've never heard GOODS like this before: it's this sorrowful ghostly drone- wordless. I stand outside recording the golden doorknob on my phone for posterity, lit flash and hollow voices. I feel like I'm about to open the door into a new world.

I come into the kitchen area and sit down on the floor next to the counter. The kitchen spills out seamlessly into the living room, which is packed with heads familiar and unfamiliar. Theo is sitting in the front, jawline dramatically lit by homemade spotlight. He nods at me with a twinkling eye and resumes his thoughtful posture. His blonde facial hair, as long as it exists, always has a stark grizzling effect on the clear, pure angles of his face. It's never just facial hair.

I sit down just in time for a few more silent nods of recognition, from Martin, from Angel, and for the album to end. An organized group discussion launches immediately; my bookbag and heavy jacket are still on, my feet are crumpled under me. Even though Theo promised me I could drop by the studio some time and hear the album, and even though I'm a practitioner of

the mindset that timing is always perfectly inevitable my soul aches at being left out of this experience.

“We asked you to write about what animals the songs reminded you of, and the landscapes you were imagining throughout.”

Everyone has stacks of little half-sheets with printed song titles at the head and scribbles underneath. People, mostly Uggie and Em, raise their hands and start talking about whales, and birds, and ice, and oceans and shit. Fuuuuuuck. It sounds so fucking cool. Everyone digs it hard, except for the worries that perhaps Majila and Theo sound a little too comfortable; aren't pushing their boundaries viscerally enough. Theo and Maj nod respectfully. We disperse into informality and the album starts playing back again at a lower volume. Ricky isn't there. Where is Ricky?

I meet a young lady in make-up, she is black hair, red lips, and shining blue eyes. She doesn't know anybody here, we probe each other for stature. I like talking to her, and meeting new people, but... I *do* know people here. So a lull in our conversation arises, and we never see each other again. Uggie mentions something to me about this being a room full of connections, you know, career-wise. I don't care about that kind of thing the way she does, never have, but we have different goals and methodologies. Marcus, Em's boyfriend, used his note papers to draw a picture of a guy named Broke-ass Jack. Uggie decides it's hilarious and now everyone is sharing pictures of their own Jacks with broken asses.

Outside, in the winter night, I text Ricky. She tells me she told me she wasn't coming. I go through my messages: **NO, SHE DIDN'T**. I ask if I can come over, she says yes. I don't drop anything off.

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Ah, fuck. It's way later than we thought. The next North bus takes like 20 minutes and by the time me and Walter get on it its already like 11:25. I think we might have fucked up lol. By the time we get to Alligator it's 11:40. And there's a line. My blood is racing, we *have* to get to Ricky and the crew by midnight.

11:45. We get in. I've never been here before, it looks pretty much how I would have imagined. It's just a long dark neon room with people in button ups and skirts. I yell at Walt that I'm going to look for Ricky, I look down at my phone, she hasn't texted me back yet. I bump & weave around like a little drunk needle in a bæ-stack . They're not in sight. There would definitely be enough of them that I would spot them immediately in this skinny ass room. 11:49. Ah, god. I get a text from Ricky “in the basement,” *what?* The music pounds, my head is a subwoofer. I tap someone's shoulder and shout at them “DO YOU KNOW WHERE THE BASEMENT IS” they point *back* toward the entrance. To get to the basement one has to

stay along the right wall and then about halfway down the room's length there's an opening that leads to stairs. There is a long. Ass. Line. to get to the basement. My stomach drops.

I'm a needle in hyperspace, in the zone of all zones, I catch Walter and tell him the news. We get in line, basically as far back as the front entrance. The DJ shouts from somewhere in the black blues and greens "WE GOT TEN MINUTES Y'ALL!" Walter and I make eye-contact, I give him an exaggerated, stressed out grimace. We totter forward bit by bit by bit. I text Ricky back "Ok we're coming."

Walter tells me he's gonna run over to the bar and buy us drinks. I yell back okay but if I have to I'ma leave his ass. We're not going to get down there. They're probably at capacity downstairs and only letting people down when others come up. But why would anyone come up when it's ten... seven minutes to midnight. I'm fucked. We're fucked, I fucked it up.

And yet, bit by bit by bit, minute by minute I'm making progress. There's only eight people in front of me. I look over across the room at the bar, Walter is motioning 'Two' with his fingers to a bartender. They let three more people downstairs, I'm like "I just might make it, but I'ma have to leave his ass." I'm in the top 5. It's 11:56. I can't see Walter anymore. I really don't want to lose him. I really want to have this midnight with him too. I'm going to be in the next batch of people let down. Where is Walter, I feel a tap on my shoulder, it's Walter with two coke & somethings in his hand, this is the truth, I smile back at god.

We make it down the stairs at 11:57. I scan the room and immediately I spot Ricky, Em, Uggie, others: the team. We beeline, the circle sees us, it's all "AYYY"s and smiles. Seeing Ricky makes me want to weep. She's smiling, I know it's with her full heart. She leans over "I was like 'Damn, I guess he not coming!'" I smile and #shrug. I yell at her "IS IT OKAY IF I KISS YOU AT MIDNIGHT" she leans back from me and, with her cool on, nods. My heart, it flutters! I introduce Walter to everyone, most of them recognize him, we groove and bounce and jam. Two minutes later, the countdown happens.

[Black Eyed Peas - I Gotta Feeling starts playing]

At midnight, confetti and cold fog slams us all in the face. I have one arm around Walter and one around Ricky, two of my oldest, most trusted friends. As 2013 ends and 2014 begins: no matter what comes they need to know that I love them. I love them. Ricky and I kiss like... two drunk twenty somethings. It reminds me of her twenty first . It all probably looks pretty funny.

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We're all pregaming for New Years. Me, Walter, Leigh, Rose, and Rose's friend Moll. It feels good to see my best friend kicking it with my roommate, it feels good to see him at all. All the other best homies dropped out, they *really* didn't want to go to Alligator. And honestly, I really didn't want to go to that Soul Night or whatever. &Honestly, I was super torn because whole

time I played it cool and humored all the options with my niggas, but they all knew a bunch of my soul just wanted to find a way to be wherever Ricky was gonna be. The homies act like they love da club, but it's becoming clear to me that da club makes them anxious. They never be at the club. One of the reasons we're all growing apart. I hate it :( .And one of the reasons I'm so glad Walter is here right now.

I ask Rose if she wants to take a shot with me and Walter. She looks at me "You're drinking tonight?" I smile "It's New Years Eve, you knowww," they're glad to be drinking with me, I'm glad to be drinking with them, but I think it's a little... weird for everyone. Still, I'm trying to get fucked up tonight.

We small talk it out until Rose and them head out. Leigh is wearing my glitter on her face. It's stunning. Everything we do, all of our interactions are charged.

When it's only me and Walter left we sit and drink in the living room, talking music and relationships. I tell him about Leigh, the party, the text from that day about deciding to focus my energy and time on Ricky. The feels. He's been seeing Djohariah from time to time again. This is the first I've heard about it! He says she'll hit him up every few weeks and they go out, come back to her place, and I guess sleep together (He's vague, I fuck w it), and then after the morning she ceases contact. He says it's cool overall, he likes kicking it with her, but feels admittedly trapped in the intermittent silence.

"Like, sometimes I'll think of something normal I want to text her and then I'll think 'Is this okay? Is this too much?'" He waits on her cue to resume relations. It's cool, but it leaves him wondering, wishing things were a bit more definite.

I tell him that's how I feel with Ricky.

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"How would you feel if I was your daughter, though?"

I know it's a good point, one of *the* points of this. Mom says "I understand what you're saying, it's just that you're my son. And when stuff like this happens it can make you a target. People are going to try to mess with you." That's hers. I know that if something ever happened to me, for any reason, she'll know that this is who I am, that me being in these situations and pushing them forward is inevitable. Maybe one day she'll tell me she's proud instead of afraid.

"It doesn't matter what people say about me. I'm straight edge, I'm in school, I have a job, I'm really nice, whatever. As long as no one tries to kill me it doesn't matter." We never agree, in this conversation or others like it, we just talk ourselves dry and tell the other we love them. I

love my mom. I get off the phone with her and continue getting ready. I tweet “This is my first act as a man.”

24 and I agreed to get to the café early so we could debrief, but more importantly so neither of us could be caught alone with either of the other two people in the meeting. We’re meeting because one of All-City Poetry’s most cherished mentors Olaf Drowtfos was silently discharged at the end of last summer after a Facebook group for female poets listed him as an “unsafe” person - A serial abuser and rapist - in the national poetry community. A bunch of shit like this happened in the national poetry scene last summer, on a scale unheard of. Following that group’s post was an explosive, public FB status from a Chicago poet that explicitly named Drowtfos as well alleged a massive cover-up among the poetry elite in Chicago i.e. his friends and benefactors. We are meeting today with Mr. X, who is the founder of All-City Poetry and a man who many would call one of Drowtfos’ best friends. The day before the meeting, Mr. X informed us his right-hand administrator, Ms. Y would also be in attendance. I do not know Ms. Y. 24 is made nervous by her.

The allegations shook our friends. We were kids when we were first met Olaf. We’re still kind of kids; the oldest of us is barely 25. Many of us were directly mentored by him, all of us looked up to him. I’ve had lunches dissecting his poetry, running into him on the train early last year was the highlight of that week. I remember seeing him for the first time, my friend Green Light immediately going home and watching all of his videos. I remember being all cool, gossip!-stimulated at Green telling me about Olaf hooking up with Mudra when I was nineteen. Mudra is a year younger than me, Olaf is in his forties.

It’s a gorgeous day outside. I get a text asking if I feel nervous, I say no. I’m nervous.

The week everything came out, I went to a play put on by an older poet, Malaika White. Malaika’s play dealt with the entertainment world, and asserting identity and accountability in the aftermath of sexual assault. It was eerie. I saw Malik from across the room. When it was over, we ended up in the bathroom together. I cautiously told him that a few of us were getting together to talk about what happened, he said he knew, he’d be there. We walked to the bus together, and freaked out on a corner, it was the first time either of us had been able to talk out loud about it since the news broke. I was teary, he was fidgeting uncontrollably.

The meeting was at Majila and Angel’s. There were about ten of us, of varying closeness to Olaf. I think I was one of the ones least intimately connected to him. We vented our fears, what little we knew, our anger, our expectations for All-City Poetry’s inevitable public response. Angel informed us of what she knew, which was considerable. She had known about this for a long time. She talked about her firsthand conversations confronting Olaf, his denials and denial. His manipulation, his years of... I can’t say more. Teddy P told me it was bigger than I had any idea of. At that first meeting we wrote on a board about what we expected and demanded from our poetry communities to feel safe. After an hour and a half of heat and anxiety, we began to unify, to organize. It felt... amazing.

The second meeting one of us had to attend Olaf's daughter's baby naming ceremony. The third meeting didn't happen for months, until after I sent an email out asking what was going on. Though we had initially planned to bring in more people to each meeting to address and respond to this sensitive, divisive issue by the third meeting there were less people than there were at the first. 24, Angel, and I drafted a list of demands drawn from our discussion in the first gathering. We attached a letter explaining our anxiety at ACP's continued silence, complete with a couple dozen signatures from concerned community members. The first meeting was in September. The letter didn't go out til February. It's one of the last things I've had contact with Ricky about. She wasn't invited to the first meeting. Lines were drawn. She didn't sign. Our demands: a public statement, an event concerning sexual violence in the community and how to respond, including counselors at ACP programs, cultural competency training and articulated strict codes of conduct for their mentors. Efforts to take responsibility for this event in a way that = transparent and demonstrative . Through Ms. Y, ACP only responded that they had had meetings with internal investigators. Ostensibly, the investigators reported to her and Mr. X- the two people most liable for any of the information found. None of that information has made it to any of the other staff, which includes Majila, Malik, Martin, Nyala: about half the room at our first meeting.

[TL;DR]

By March it was just me and 24. In our last correspondence, Angel said she was tired. Majila suggested that 24 and I write a new letter. 24 and I did. We told ACP we were going to the press. For the first time since any of this began, Mr. X responded. He texted 24, "Yo, wanna meet?"

It's a lot more crowded than I thought it'd be. I grab a small table right in front of the register and don't order anything. When 24 comes, we hug. They look around, "Is there anywhere else we can sit?" There's a long table with one person and his laptop sitting in the middle of it. I preferred our weird island to perhaps being overheard by someone and having the meeting tempered by it. 24 thinks we should move. I go over and tell the man we have company coming, I ask if we can slide, he's all "No problem!" and moves to the edge. We put our things down. 24 begins placing papers on the table, our letter, ACP's responses. We spot another newly freed spot in the corner, near the front window. I motion 'thank you' to the man, we move our jackets and paper to the corner. Mr. X and Ms. Y come in.

I shake his hand, there's a big watch on it. They both have intense, blue eyes. Ms. Y has tattoos, is from the UK. He offers tea, "You want anything? Michael, you want anything?" I say no. I'm in black. He engages us in small talk, I don't want to talk at all, I do. He's handling us, 24 starts talking.

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“You don’t get to tell me I make you feel safe on New Years and then make me out to be a rape sympathizer. My friends aren’t afraid of me.”

“They are lying to you.”

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Billy is here from Palatine, we’re gabbing, trading Youtube videos in my bedroom. And then we can hear petals in the shower, sobbing.

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I wake up at four, angry, dark as the sky. I lay in bed a few seconds, then throw my upper half up. I change the music on my laptop and start working out. Around 4:20 I alternate between making lunch and working out. I’m making spaghetti. At 4:55 I take a shower. I start wrapping up the odds and ends of my morning: snacks, keys, decide what I’ll be listening to as I leave out the front door. It’s old jazz. It’s February so I’m on the 30s in my jazz discovery program. Next month it’ll be the 40s.

It’s cold, I’m still angry. The walk soothes me, somewhere deep inside. I’m still smiling on the bus, on the train. “Good morning. Thank you!” We huddle.

I brush my teeth at work. I look in the mirror. I look good. I go out to the floor.

There’s always something. There’s always something not right when I get to the unit, something to compensate for, to ask a supervisor for, to restock, to reorganize, that just isn’t there but should be. I’m angry and I’m moving fast. There is no trickling in for me, I am the bowl.

I am the Expediter.

That means I have patience, discipline, balance, speed, strength, empathy, and hopefully, eight hours of sleep. It means I am everything I was not growing up. It means that when I fuck up, or when someone tells me I fuck up, it soaks me deep. It means I’m angry. It means I’m grinding my teeth. It means there’s nowhere else in this building I’d rather be. I only started grinding my teeth after I started expediting. I started expediting around the same time I got back in school. The employees who were doing it before me all quit. An employee and her friend, the supervisor, got me to do it one day, two days, three days, weeks, and now they’re both gone and it’s my job. Time flies when you don’t have enough of it, and I have mail falling always. Always containers getting full, always containers to pull out and dispatch, always containers full of mail designated for a flight that’s leaving in 30 minutes 20 minutes 10 minutes right now it’s late, always people asking me to make a new container, always something late, always something they can’t find, always homework to do, always lover, always lonely, always independent, always an attitude, bury the attitude with love. By noon I’ll

be fine. I'm just underrating the day because I'm grumpy. But this is my life, this is all I have, this is work, this is production, this is beautiful. Look at all these people. I love them. And I am the expediter. They depend on me. Always never knew I'd be here.

Nicki texts me "Upstairs?" we meet upstairs in the cafeteria for our first break. I don't say anything about Ricky. I listen. Nicki texts me "Upstairs?" we meet upstairs for lunch. I start telling her a story,

"I was at the café Leigh works at. And I left to go home, and the bus wasn't coming so I decided to walk up Ashland instead of taking the bus. And as I'm walking I'm seeing all this stuff, like I remembered seeing when me and Ricky tripped. And you remember how I said she went like looking for old dude, to have like some sort of moment or whatever. I realized, I was doing the same thing. I was *looking* for her. And I passed this Mexican place and I was like 'Should I have a burrito fuck it I'ma go home... but first I'ma get some headphones.' And I'm in CVS and I hear someone go 'psst' and... it's her.... She was like '*you're cute*' aaaah. Yeah it was like so fucking awkward though. I hated it. She was going to a thing and like we talked a little but like she was like... she was like fucking hunched over. Like it fucking hurt her to see me. And like her voice was so small. And then like she went to the front and I asked the employee for headphones and I had to go like right past her again. We didn't say anything." I'm grimacing.

Subject change. After work, waiting for the bus, Dick replies "I must have grown up really sheltered, because I didn't... or at least I didn't know of any of the women around me being assaulted." I say something about statistics.

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The apartment is getting dirtier, and darker. There are no working lights in either part of the living room. I'm worried about the bills. I keep saying "This is going to be the best summer ever." As I'm talking to petals, it is the afternoon, her bed is covers and tissue and Netflix and a pizza box and her and what the lines in her face and of her hair say and her hand with a slice of lukewarm pizza in it and she starts laughing at it all and I start laughing and she keeps laughing and it is dark and hard to see her.

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[Skrillex - Coast is Clear starts playing, fades out]

I'm skipping, running, jumping down the street listening to a new Pierce collaboration. It's a raunchy uptempo dance joint, I'm feeling sexy and unsettled. I'm wearing this yellow onesie thing, think Luke Cage in the 70s but with exposed thighs, with my hair picked out and a small headband that appears like a golden wreath underlining my picked out afro. It's supposed to

be the end of winter soon, I went shopping yesterday. I'm thinking about Leigh asking me for us to be open again. I understood it as something that wasn't going to go away, we sat on her bedroom floor talked, cried, embraced. Since then I've felt waves of contorting feelings. It's got me yelling down this street on my way to her apARTyment show in Pilsen.

It's a nice night in a frigid winter. It's a full moon. I don't know what's coming.

I'm there and it's stimulation everywhere. My best friends are unexpectedly coming. What are the odds, they'll get to meet Leigh. That's real. Someone starts shouting compliments and questions at me in a circle full of people, I am polite, but uninterested in that energy. I am small-talking, Leigh is somewhere even when she's near. Speaking in half-meanings, stressed, relaxed, unseen, at my lips, talking or not. My friends stand around for a while and then leave before any art starts happening. They say they'll be back, they do not come back. Leigh goes on shortly after they leave. I meet her bearded friend, I am affable, he is smiles and laughs.

She is on a box, throwing paper, shouting about love and lack of self love and being ready for love and identity distorted and amplified in social media; it's a whirlwind of slightly hooked exclamation points. Someone important kneeling inside of a wooden installation starts droning waves of sound from his guitar as her words wind down. She yells, has us yell, about love and readiness, curses and blessings. She finishes, papers and people everywhere, sound everywhere dying, dying down. She is in arms and exhausted, we are exhausted, I am waiting, she hugs people, people tearfully say things, her bearded friend picks her up with his hug, I am waiting, I am still, she comes to me and I hold her.

Later it is a party again, with cool visual shit everywhere. I am a sun, dancing and bouncing, I am meeting people, re-meeting people. I am checking on Leigh, I am disappointed in my friends, I am dread, I am free and young and alive and in community. Leigh would like to leave.

We leave, it is flurries. I go off to the side when the coast is clear and change into black corduroys and a Michigan sweatshirt from last night's shopping. We are walking and talking, the party is alive in our throats. We reach a park, we are under the moon, there are frozen puddles milky gray. Her bearded friend, she tells me, is a potential someone new and she did not expect him to be there tonight. She thinks he is really falling for her, ellipsis. I say a Drake lyric and she agrees, we walk around the park, looking out at things, off of things.

We are in her apartment. I tell her I think the conversation has changed. She says "No matter what happens, it will be the best thing for all parties involved." She is right, we are in bed, an anxious darkness of love.

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We're riding the bus and she's talking. We're going from her place to her job, it's a bright white morning or maybe there's no snow at all. Maybe it's cold, maybe it's really cold. It's not really cold. She's talking and the bus voice says "Pullman," where we met. She finishes her sentence, I say "I think I love you."

Maybe she says it back, maybe her lips curl into a big eyed grin and she pulls out her phone and headphones. Maybe I put them on myself and press play, maybe she puts them on for me. Her voice is singing, repeating "son" "sun" "perfect sun" "to tell you I love you" "til summer sun" "I will wait" "I will tell you I love you" we are off the bus, cello and another's voice are swelling under her's, I am caught up, overwhelmed. We are holding hands and kissing and smiling, maybe I am crying.

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"She said she wasn't doing that kind of shit with anyone else"

"She said that...?"

"Yeah(?)"

"It's not until afterwards or like when you're talking about it that you realize how fucked up something is"

"thinking about it now, I'm pretty sure I loved her"

"It may take a year before you all are able to be friends again"

"she said she was happy to see me"

"I was tweaking super hard but like"

"and she said 'I don't know...' I said 'I'm not sure what's gonna happen but I think I'm gonna pursue things with this other person'"

"Ohh, Mikey, no!!"

We met outside, I was eating. I told him I didn't want to meet at the ACP building. We talked about why. He said some things I won't repeat to you. He still works there, you know. I listened to him a long time, I wish I could listen to him for hours I wish I could take care of him, I love him and hate the hurt in his heart. We walked, eventually he had to let some people into ACP to have a meeting, I said okay I'll come. We started talking about the other reasons I wasn't trying to come around a lot.

The meeting was a rap group's, homies & brothers; talking shows, watching obscured rap

from the early 90s, talking the very real mythology of what birthed it, what it birthed. Crucial conflicts, Crucial Conflict. Laughing at rival rappers' soundcloud, arguing about JAY Z verses, back to shows. I dipped after a while. It was a great afternoon.

I try not to tear apart the television when it's me and my mom. She knows I know she knows how I feel about... everything. If it's black television, the kind of stuff she raised me on, I'm always game, always in love. A reality show, a news commentator, a commercial break, and I get to shredding. We get the most traction when we talk about me. Weird.

\*\*

Petals in my doorway. She wants to quit her job. These days I'm not sure why she stayed around there in the first place after what happened happened. It has only gotten worse and I'm not certain how it could have gotten better. But I'm worried about the bills, and she doesn't have anything else lined up.

[Sampha - Indecision starts playing]

END OF PART ONE