

The Martins

i.

Harboring a tendency to remove herself from others, she averts the claustrophobic crowd and watches her slender feet push individual grasses down which bend back into their rightful place—impressed with her ability to pinpoint satisfaction in something reserved only for her. Norwegian summer was full-on, svelte, after seasons of perpetual isolation and disappointment. She had resigned to her current position out of necessity—a victim of looks and entertainment value—but when he joins her on the edge of the slope overlooking the fjord, lone sailboat coasting along, she realizes that she has made a mistake. Self-assured smirk intact, he explains his politicized project—which didn't happen because the small town didn't want the same lawn which now surrounded them to go uncut for one year. She identifies one of her kind. Yet, due to his warped reflection, she doesn't process the siren. The panorama morphs with her inscape. In the future, she will access this same view to combat a demented beast which inconveniently covets her successes and failures. Tipsy, she stalks his scent into an adjacent field, blades beneath his feet untouched.

She cannot stay away from him. His responses to her inquiries appear rushed, mildly amused. Typing is sloppy—missing punctuation, no formal signature, two spaces randomly between words. He quizzically avoids her cogent investigations. She has a history of taking the brass ring with calculated forethought. But not this time. She contorts his glib remarks and lukewarm observations, and she blames her inability to communicate with him on the fact that they share dissimilar homelands. She makes excuses for his truancy. When he finally chimes in, she forgets her anxiety and realigns her desire. *My throat is deep enough to swallow him whole.* Their communications become one-sided with honest declarations stemming only from her. He occasionally acknowledges her witticisms and confessions: “I’m flattered.” or “Ha!” or “I don’t know what to say.” or: “I recently became the father of a little boy, but the art world is small. I’m sure we’ll meet again.” Symptoms: cinephilia, Delirium tremens, elaborate image searches, soliloquies, cheap thrills, sobbing, cruelty towards strangers.

He convinces her to fly across the Atlantic so they can talk face-to-face. *Convince* isn't quite right. Rather, he simply answers, "Do you need me to come to you?" with a "Yes." A rescue mission. He suggests a lackluster event in Chelsea; she declines because there is no privacy; they agree to meet at St. Mark's Bookshop. She receives his text en route: "The babysitter fucked up. Let's meet at noon instead. //M." His face upon arrival: unshaven, searching. In short: *everything*. He awaits with his baby carriage and fair-haired tyke sporting a tiny Daniel Johnston *Hi, how are you?* t-shirt. A charmer flashing inexperienced gleam—but not hers. They walk through the neighborhood on auto-pilot, grazing banal topics like college debt and their friends who still rent windowless rooms in shared flats. They gravitate towards a park bench; the neighboring one is occupied by a drunk. "How do you feel about children?" "What do you want to do with me?" "Yes, I need you to tell me." "Do you want to get a hotel room?" "But things might change!" "It's not a good time, can't you see that?" "There must be some misunderstanding; I'm in love with my girlfriend." "Uh, let's talk about politics." "I'm trying to figure out how to relate to you." "Look! The dogs look just like their owners." "Why can't we be friends?" "Your silence is very loud." "Let me know if you change your mind."

The covering of tracks. If one cannot go the distance, the race never existed. “You read too much into what I say.” “This is in your head.” “I can't be in this conversation!” She spends the rest of her week not with him, as planned, but immersed in pedestrian diversions. She refuses to meet him again, despite his suggestions. She accuses him of “knocking up” the other woman—purposefully lowbrow to humiliate. “That is NOT what happened!” She fights with him, for her sanity: “People who are in love do not secretly meet other women and attempt to persuade them to talk about *special* things.” Seeing the baby triggers an interest in the mother, despite her initial affinity for erasure. She discovers the mother's identity with the right search combination: father's full name + baby's first name. A respectable artist—large-scale paintings, architectural motifs, site-specific installations. Annoyed with herself, she feigns a sisterly rapport with the other woman, sharing an imaginary cycling path, bleeding light rays, drinking from the same spiked canteen. With more research, she discovers that they are both only children, both raised in isolated locales, both love large breed dogs. Prey and servant to a big-eyed Viking approaching forty, he tends to the babe until pre-school either alleviates the burden or shatters the façade. The mother sketches a Sant'Elia-influenced rendering in her uninterrupted studio and receives international praise.