

I, Dreamer

Laura McCormack

*I love you because you're innocent,
You fell out through a hole inside the sun.*

Shirley Manson

I dreamt of you, not long after we met. The specifics are lost, but the voices and faces wrapped solidly around my heart and squeezed, letting me know right from the start that I was in trouble. In the dream, I smiled in contentment at the thrum of people around me, but it was your hand suddenly in mine that surprised me. The blueness of your eyes betrayed no hint of an untruth when your lips brushed my ear and murmured one plain, perfect word: mine.

And then I awoke, to your fingers tangled in my hair and your palm wrapped around the bone of my hip, holding me in your sleep as though afraid to ever let go. I traced my fingers across your bare chest, smiling when you jerked away a little when I reached a ticklish spot, heart beating in my own chest at the greatness I had discovered. I used my toes to carve lines in the muscular calves intertwined with mine, my lips to smooth the pained creases in your eyes. I whispered that same plain and perfect word: *mine*.



I am afraid of you, I had said earlier in the evening, as you explored the concave plane of my neck and pinned my hand

to my side when I protested. You make my plans and my words and my rationality go right out the window. You had smiled against my shoulder, amused, kissed me delicately. My theory is that fear is good. It tells you when something is about to be shaken up.

I had laughed. *You're so sure.* I reached to kiss you, but you held my wrists up above my head, using your body to still my laughter. You looked at me, gaze honest and raw on my face. *Don't ever doubt me.* I never knew there were so many ways to love somebody.

And then, just like that, I became tied to another. In that tangle of sheets and limbs your breath became rhythmic and mesmerising, and I fell asleep with a sense of enveloped safety so overwhelming it almost smothered me. The air smelled with the heady mix of our combined scents, and I inhaled sweat and coffee and vanilla like a favourite wine. When you rolled in your sleep and threw a pillow against a wall, I curled tighter around you, trying to protect you from the bad dream. It was then I should have known, but I did not.



I dreamt, as an adolescent, of a certain kind of sensuality, like silk against the Raphaelite slope of my shoulders. A creation of particles, some liquid, some solid and others curiously fibrous, contorted and sculpted in such a way that the human movement becomes a universal form of expression. Older now, you watched me dance to my own private tune, humming and lightweight across the floor of our apartment. In turn, I watched you trace lines, dimples, angles and planes across my torso and down between my legs as a roadmap to the future, like something only my particular form could create. And in between, we learned the roadmaps of each other's minds, opening and creating and revealing, finding new meanings in shared ideas. We oscillated in tandem, you and I,

and as I blossomed outwards, I presumed you were doing the same. Perhaps you were my fault.



I began to seek weighted words with punctuated rhythm, deep timbres and impeccable measurements to encapsulate the magnitude of your greatness. The perfect word to describe a perfect sensation — moist, plinth, lacquer, thrust — which made you laugh as I hypothesised. *Does that brain of yours ever shut off?* you teased, resting your chin on the rise of my collarbone. I smiled coquettishly. *Threatened, baby?*

You chuckled, and twirled me to face you, pulling me flush against your body. *Always. You make me feel like such a dumb-ass, I'm going to have to read dictionaries just to keep up with you.*

Later, I woke to find you gone. Following the sounds of running water, I turned the handle to the bathroom door to find you hunched in the spray of the shower. *Baby?* I whispered. *Are you coming back to bed?*

You turned to face me, and somewhere between feeling a familiar tug of arousal between my legs and meeting your gaze, I saw how red your eyes were. You smiled scratchily, shutting off the water. *I'll be right there.*

I looked at you, unsure, measuring your stare. You looked back reassuringly, almost defiantly, and I chose not to question it. When you slipped under the covers and kissed my hair, muttering *beautiful* and *perfect* between each touch, I shifted to look at you. *Baby*, I said, *you know you can tell me anything, right?*

You stiffened, but subtly enough that you thought you'd concealed it. I continued, reaching up to cup your face. *I love you, and that is not going to change.*

You smiled, pulled me closer. *I love you too. I can't believe how lucky I am.*

And then, as I pretended to fall asleep in your arms, you lay awake. I did not know whom you were whispering to, but perhaps I should have asked.



I began to dream of Utopia, which though traditionally hard to find, began to evolve with each day I spent with you. Each planet on the chart of stars lining the east wall of my bedroom bore imperfections — Mercury too hot, Venus too pressurised — and chemical alignment was volatile. Hydrogen, helium, methane and ammonia, ice particles and ambiguous rock, all simmering long enough to form shiny spheres at the end of my telescope, but threatening to warp at any moment. I taught you their names and told you the story of Andromeda, the goddess in the sky right between her mother and father. You kissed the top of my head and smiled. *Maybe that's a good name for our daughter.* I laughed, reminding you of our young age, and you joined me, but I saw the spark in your eyes. The spark you always had when you were thinking of hope, and not the black holes in your head threatening to engulf a galaxy of ideas.



When you left me, neither of us thought it was the end. Your ideas had an opportunity to come to fruition, and I encouraged you to follow them. *But I don't want to leave you,* you whispered to my cleavage. I held you tight against my body, praying you couldn't see the salt trails on my face. *It's not forever. I will come and see you at the first opportunity I get.*

To compensate for my loneliness, to warm my heart and body with the ache of solitude instead of completion, I read great works to soothe my need for control. I felt the conflict of inadequacy and inaction between Ibsen and Chekhov, waited even longer for Godot. But as he never came, twice, and Wharton's eternal fidelity felt overcome by fatigue, the

ache grew louder, and when I answered your call that evening I was ready to demand for you to come home. But the person on the end of the line was not someone I recognised. He babbled about conspiracies and what the voices had told him, and I realised you had been taken hostage by your head. By the time the line disconnected, this head had accused me of both murder and infidelity, and that was the last time I ever spoke to either of you.

And then, because I could not remember, I dreamt of the last time I spoke to the you I remembered. I imagined being able to see it all along, and not blinded by the flush of love. I imagined telling you I loved you, reminding you to take the pills, reminding you of all our plans for your return. I imagined you feeling the phantom press of my lips against your cheek, smiling as you recalled the touch of my palms slipping under your shirt. I imagined my future as it would have been under your gaze, and I was paralysed by whether that was a signifier of sadness, or of relief that it would never be.



Now, I dream of another. He is the antithesis of you, strong, independent, complex in a way I can read, and with each smile he gifts to me, he unknowingly heals my battle wounds. I write this now to honour him, pay respect to the love I have for him. I confess to the prospect of a future without the weight of your bereavement keeping me from that new exhilaration. I am, for now, complete.



(And yet, you cannot describe the disappearing act of a first love. There is no language sufficient for that kind of grief.)



(The breathtaking, hollow calm.)



(The absolute, utter loss.)



Laura McCormack wrote this as a university undergraduate
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