

I ask Grace: *Are you old enough to buy cigarettes?* She says: *I don't know, but I always get them.*

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Guys always push the wine bottle away from the edge when they see me. When I say something, they admit they don't trust me—*I don't want you to knock it over*, they reason, as if I look like a clumsy, messy person.

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The guest speaker says in a luscious lull: I want you to think of someone who is very easy to have love and kindness for.

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I ask him: *When did you start smoking?* He says: *I don't smoke*, proceeding to exhale and ash his cigarette. He's telling me about the 7-inch he bought at the record store down the alleyway, "He wrote the song for her," he says, "and he told her to 'sing it like a little boy.'"

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In my backyard, I am whispering to myself: *I wish you were here I wish you were here*, and I could go on and on and write a novel of my longing but my battery is low but even if it wasn't I'm sure I wouldn't even find the words. His knees read CHOOSE LIFE, even though he died once already this year. That's more times than most living people have died.

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My fortune cookie reads: Fear is the darkroom where negatives are developed.

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And finally it hits me, I'd been waiting and thinking and wondering and it just comes over me like a fit of sickness or a vision: I left my choker at his apartment, sitting atop his stack of books,

in front of his Polaroid picture of me. That is what I want back from him and really what I want back is him.

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Haley sends me a link to “Bullshit” by Palehound, a gentle indie ballad we’ve been listening to on repeat for weeks. She says: *This sounds like what you would slow dance to drunk with a guy ur in love with at ur house*

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I transfer my heartbreak over from one person to the next.

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He asks me how I like his new car and I accidentally start talking theoretically about how it would be to road trip in it and sleep in it. He lets me play “Drown Me Out”—*there’s nothing to talk about / when we talk about love*. Electrified guitar riffs, the enveloping blue, the tension of cold weather and warm clothes. I slowly watch him fall into me. He rubs my back when we smoke outside. We talk about next time as if there is one.

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1. Blue Camels
2. Marlboro Reds
3. Parliaments
4. Light Blue American Spirits
5. Yellow American Spirits

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We are walking to Molasses Books when a little girl standing on the sidewalk looks at him and holds out a leaf to him. *Thank you*, he says, laughing and flattered, taking it into his hands. She

blushes. *Was she flirting?* I joke, instinctively ripping the gift from his hands, tossing it on the ground. The girl screams in the distance.

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*It was this really grand set up for what was about to happen,* the guy in the coffeeshop says to the other guy in the coffeeshop, *and then it just didn't. And then that repeated itself over and over. Constant anticlimax.*

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I am playfully stabbing his hand with my acrylic nails, asking him if it hurts. It doesn't. We revel in our ephemeral, lighthearted touch. He reaches into his bag, puts on his brass knuckles, and pretends to punch me; I laugh, roll my eyes, and ask: *Why'd you bring them?* He says: *Just in case.*

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My fortune cookie reads: It's always better to light a candle than to curse the darkness.

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*I need to get your book and your pants,* I say. He says: *I need to get your cigarettes.* This exchange is the end.

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As soon as he's gone, I'm in Greenpoint smoking the rest of my pack of Blue Camels on someone else's back porch, and when I go back in he asks accusingly: *How many cigarettes did you smoke?* because I can never smoke just one. He apologizes for the time at Hart Bar, when he left by 10 P.M. and I got lost on my way home after two drinks. When he's kissing my neck, I say: *I wanted you to kiss me,* and he says: *I wasn't in a good place,* and I say: *I like the place you're in now.*