

Tom Andes

Bodies

Traci kissed like cardboard – cold tongue, wooden lips – and still the feeling she was smiling under mine. Behind us, off in the corner of the studio apartment, behind the shower curtains he'd hung around his bed, John was snoring, a long inhale followed by a soft exhale, then an almost agonizing delay, during which I waited for him to regain his breath, before the inhale again. Beside him, Heather murmured softly to herself in her sleep. Scraps of photographs still littered the floor, the same photographs to which Traci had taken a pair of scissors, sobbing, after John had dumped her the week before. *Crazy bitch*, he'd called her, hanging the shower curtains around his bed the night he brought Heather home.

“Paul?”

“I have to go home,” I said.

We kissed some more. Outside, three flights down, a car shushed softly past, its tires slicing through the snow in the street. Across the street, snow tipped the steeple on St. Henry's. Through the windows, when I opened my eyes, I could see the bell's shoulder where it hung beneath the clock face, its black shape bulking against the moon-bright sky.

“You're drunk. You shouldn't be driving.”

“I have to go home,” I said.

Stillness. I remember the stillness in the room. And still, though I'd said I had to leave, that I wanted to leave, we kissed some more. Whenever it came time to break away, whenever it seemed either of us might speak, I tipped back her chin, and I leaned into her and kissed her again. From behind the shower curtain, I remember the sound of John snoring drunkenly in the darkness, and I remember Heather murmuring softly beside him in her sleep. I could smell the cigarette butts in the large, gilt, blue and white enameled, free-standing ashtray beside the couch, next to the coffee table, where over Thanksgiving that year, someone had gouged these letters into the varnished wood with a pocketknife:

FUCK PORTSMOUTH.

“You can stay,” she said. “He doesn't care.”

I ran my hands up the sides of her dress. I touched her chest, her face. She seemed too small, too thin.

“I have to go home,” I said.

“Well, at least smoke one more cigarette with me before you go.”

And so we kissed some more. When again we broke our embrace, and I opened my eyes, what light was in the room – from the moon, from the streetlamps outside – seemed to pool in her eyes. Her eyes, imploring me in the darkness, and all I could think was that I had to flee. You'd never have made me pay for my own abortion and then handed the receipt from the clinic around to your friends at a party, her eyes seemed to say, which was something John had done to her and was probably true enough. Still, I held her, and I touched her chest. From behind the shower curtain came a rustling, a groan, as of someone rolling over, readjusting a body in sleep. I pressed my lips to

Traci's, and I held my own breath, as if in sympathy, while I waited for John's next inhale in the darkness.