

Stolen

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You say, “I guess we just need to forget.” So I lie.

Static fills the receiver of the phone. I picture you biting your lip, trying to delay the goodbye cracking against your throat. My vision blurs and the inside of my nostrils sting. This is ridiculous, you are not even mine. You were never mine. You are a 1972 truck with high miles and a slightly rusting body, I stole from the safety of a suburban garage. You want to peel wheels, speed through towns, and trade in the family vehicle for a two-seater with four wheel drive. You revved your engine, and made the concrete beneath my feet tremble. You were only a lender for the summer that I did not have permission to drive.

I’m not sure how this even began. Or where within us this lust suddenly ignited and boiled. I rationalize. I try to comb through the tangles of this mess, and separate things into simple solid clumps. Scan for moments, and freeze them. Slow them down frame by frame despite how quickly they unfolded. I want to remember. I want some kind of explainable excuse.

This is what I see.

Me. An idealistic college student, unattached, lost and searching. Ready to rattle the foundations of life, I join a group to spend the summer touring Southern Africa.

You. You had kids too early. Got married. Did the “right” thing. You had never ventured far from the green of your yard, let alone the borders of your country. Tired of the worker-of-the world routine, disenchanted and trapped in life, you switched jobs. Found something with a little “mobility” like driving a tour bus.

A simple well trained look. The look you would scan across a room with towards my direction. The stare that could scout me out in any crowded place, that I could feel against my skin, and know you are there without even needing to check. The kind I would pretend not to notice, as I blushed with a trace of a smile. The dead on glare I would return that would say- stop it buddy, you know you can’t have

this, and as your eyes would shuffle, under the same breath say-maybe you can.

Glass beer bottles clinking as we cheered by a radiating fire. The way you would shift your attention and poke at fading logs, when our conversations became too heavy, or when my eyes couldn't leave yours. Sitting too close and lingering too long, until with heavy bodies we forced ourselves to say goodnight. And you would watch the halo of my torch guide me to my tent, as I would watch your back turn and disappear into the night.

Small chivalrous acts. You insist I wear your coat, when I shiver, yet swear I'm fine. You set up my tent when I skipped dinner to catch the last glimpse of mountain tops and bright hues of orange and pink painting the sky. The strength of my arm pulling you up from your seat, persistent that this time you wouldn't miss it. The jabs of my elbow into your side, teasing, but longing for any excuse to touch you. The feeling of lightlessness as you would carry me over your shoulder and spin in circles until I would scream and swear I would vomit all over your head if you didn't stop.

It unravels like this.

I find myself there in the frozen night, conveniently placed in the privacy of just your company. The silence and your blanket wrap unevenly around us. Asking if it is okay to do so, you put your arm around me. I shiver, though no longer cold. Your fingers inch down the trail of my spine. My back dissolves. I know we are already crossing borders. But this doesn't stop me; this hasn't changed the way I feel. Your lips gravitate to mine through the dark. My blood sears and melts, fueling me to keep going. I want to drive fast. I want to go off-road, and stir up gravel until the path behind us disappears in a cloud of dust. I want to stomp on your petal, go balls to the wall, and hear your engine hum.

Everything matters then. I think of Lee Anna lying in bed alone, her head cuddled up to the scent of your pillow. Crayon drawings of a happy family hanging on the refrigerator door. Suddenly, I'm aware that we are speeding through stop signs. That if we don't brake now this could be dangerous. I picture the sudden evacuation of your body shattering through the windshield, and taking me with it. This could get messy. So I brake. The inertia of all of this has already lunged us too far. We have to stop. I have no business being here, you are not mine to drive.

The last time I saw you was at the airport. You let tears freely drip from your eyes, as we hugged perhaps too long. Members of my group gawk at us suspiciously. You whisper "I love you" and I fear rumors and headlines, our faces unexpectedly turning up on the cover of a tabloid.

Now you call. You say you want to leave the certainty of your life. You tell me that I have turned the key and started something you can't simply shut off. You have tasted open road and have miles to burn before wanting to turn back. It seems a shame to just let you run idle, but I remind you; someone still finds you reliable and sturdy. You are not mine to give back.

You say, "So I guess we should just forget."

And I lie. "Yes." As if I simply could.