

There was something different about her.

That's how it all started. A dried bit of sleep was caught on one of her short, greyish eyelashes, and the little, bright speck moved up and down when she blinked. Eventually, it dropped from her eyelash and landed on her flushed cheek. It was freezing outside. Soon, March. I felt the urge to softly brush the little speck away with my finger, but I resisted. Alice, meet Mathilde – your new colleague, my boss said. She offered her hand in an assured way, her fingers cold and bony, but maybe they were just numb from outside. She quickly undid the big buttons of her winter coat and threw it over the chair closest to her, sitting down next to it. She rubbed her hands together a little desperately, and I wanted to wrap my hands around them, to squeeze them and transfer my warmth to her.

I remember the first time I met Mathilde. In that sense, she's different from everyone else I've ever been in love with, but I can't remember the next few times I saw her,

so she's also different in that way. It must have been at the office. We sat across from each other, our desks mirrored. We could catch each other's eyes by looking up from our computer screens and leaning a bit to the side. I'd come home tired every day, but in a good way. I would Hoover and wash the floors, drinking a glass of wine in the kitchen while the floors dried. It took a long time. It rained every day and nothing in the flat ever seemed to dry completely. Everything was tinged with moisture.

The wet laundry hanging in the bedroom and living room only increased the level of humidity. I couldn't stop cleaning. It felt necessary after the six seasons of *How I Met Your Mother* I had watched in January. All this housework was more than a diversion. Cleaning had become meditative for me in a way that practical tasks had never been before: slowly dusting shelves with a wet rag and picturing the little speck of dried goo on her eyelash, methodically Hoovering the floors and imagining big, round buttons pried out of their holes by stiff fingers and chewed nails.

At ten o'clock, I fell asleep in clean sheets and slept a dreamless sleep. I woke up around seven, got out of bed and pulled a dress down from the clothes rack. Found a cardigan in the drawer. I think all of February went by like that. Maybe something inside me knew that I wouldn't want to spend my time cleaning a few months from now? Like a bear going into hibernation, I isolated myself in my little hole. I was preparing for the coming of summer, its raven-

ous consumption of nourishment. I was lying in wait, but I wasn't even waiting – not really. Bears probably don't wait for summer and its abundance of food, and they don't sleep because they want to. They wake up because their instinct, their biological clock, tells them it's time.

I woke up in March.

It wasn't abrupt like you see in the movies. When the camera zooms in on the face of the person waking, and BOOM! their eyes open. I awoke slowly, disoriented. It took days for me to understand what was happening. It bothers me now, that I let my feelings for Mathilde sneak up on me like that.

We were sitting at the bar, or rather, Mathilde had taken a seat at the bar that first night, and when I arrived, I thought she wasn't there. I stood in the doorway looking for her among all the other talking, drinking, smoking people, and my stomach clenched. And then a delicate, pale hand waved. There she was, smiling from one of the high bar stools, but not like we were colleagues, more like we knew each other's deepest secrets. We talked a bit about work, about our plans for the weekend. But it wasn't the usual small talk, at least not the kind I was used to. I raised my beer bottle to my lips, but Mathilde stopped me: In this bar, we use glasses. Even though I prefer to drink from the bottle too, she said as her hand brushed my thigh.

Was it a date?

There was a little space between us as we drank our first beer. A woman sat down next to me and hung a boxy bag over her chair. It kept bumping into my knee, but it didn't bother me. I just pushed my chair closer to Mathilde's. The woman with the bag bought a round and winked at me. Why should it matter whether you're born with a dick or a cunt? Mathilde said. She lit another cigarette and talked about emancipation and stigma. Her voice was strong in a way I hadn't heard before. Suddenly, I felt light and airy. Her words were like hundreds of helium balloons tied to my feet, my knees, my shoulders, my ears. My plaited hair.

I don't regret anything I've done, Mathilde said, because I'm happy to be where I am now. A droplet of beer clung to her upper lip as the words came out. I could feel with my entire body that I was younger than her. That I still had my youth, that hers was disappearing, ebbing away.

I slept with her.

Mathilde nodded towards the bartender. It was only a few times, just because, you know. And I made a noise that indicated that I knew.

Back home, I'm restless and you're skyping me from Hanoi and saying that you can't sleep, that you miss me, that six

months is too long to be apart. I feel a bubbling feeling and say I love you too. It's dark in your room and I can only see the outline of your face when you hold up the phone close to your eyes, which makes you squint a little. Something has changed. I was so jealous of you and your adventures when you were sending me pictures of palm trees and penthouses and gin & tonics. Now it's the other way around. I send you pictures of Copenhagen bursting in the spring, and you send me long messages about how much you're looking forward to coming home and going on adventures together in our city, the same Copenhagen that you, a few months ago, couldn't stand. That feeling is apparently gone. Or you're starting to realise that your dissatisfaction with everything besides me might have more to do with yourself than where you are.

You don't want to hang up. My thumb hovers over the red button on the screen as you, for a second time, ask what I'm doing tomorrow. I'm so tired, I say, and you smile and give the camera a kiss. Your lips fill the screen. Finally you hang up and my hands are free. My fingers press against my clitoris in the way that usually works, but the pictures in my head appear in flashes, and my clit and my wrist start hurting, but my fingers keep going.

I inherited my dad's greed. It's there in my breasts and my belly and my cunt. In the gap between my front teeth which has gotten smaller with age but is still big enough to fit a string of spaghetti through. My greed is impossible to get rid of. It laughs mockingly at me in the mirror. You can try your best to be virtuous, it says, but I'm stuck inside you. Like the genetic mutation that causes breast and cervical cancer. Angelina Jolie has it. She had a mastectomy and hysterectomy. They call it risk-reducing surgery. I can't prevent the consequences though. My greed is just there, destroying everything.

My greed and boredom are intertwined, strung together inside my body. As a teenager, I learned that addiction was the only thing that could relieve my greed and boredom, and alcohol was sitting right there. Being drunk for the first time was wonderful. My world was turned upside down, I was in free fall. When I was sixteen years old, I got so drunk I peed my pants outside the front door of my childhood home. The complete loss of control was fantastic. Listening to my own

urine splashing on the pavement, completely alone with that sound and the warm feeling between my legs, spreading across my buttocks. After that night, there was no going back. I waited in line to get into nightclubs with my fake ID and lied with hungry eyes about my age, my star sign, my home address. Anything was possible. No one noticed I was spiralling. Or they didn't care. Was my obsession with alcohol a conscious choice?

My obsession with Mathilde wasn't.