

# dream lives and cancers

by Glynnis Eldridge

Around sunset or sometime after, we are on the futon talking about dream lives and cancers. He asks me about my ideal living situation, my ideal career, my ideals in general. I would be a turtle, I say. I would travel and have a home I could always go to, I could always be alone. Maybe you could drive trucks, he says. I have thought about it.

He asks me about freckles. He asks me about cancers. Are they related? I talk about my tumors; the surface one, the strawberry, and the long one, the football sized one that was unseen except in x-rays. I don't know if they were related. Did you have surgery? No, I took some medicine, had some injections. Is the big one completely gone? I think so. Do you worry about it coming back? Every once in a while, I do. Sometimes I wish it would come back. I would like to know how I would handle something like that now. I wonder if I would survive.

"I know you would," he says, "you are very strong."

He kisses my forehead for months. I cannot give you clarity, he says. Neither of us want another now. He tells me to lie next to him, to put my head on his chest. I tell him I don't want to. I cannot give you what you want, he says. He kisses my eyelids. He looks at the cuts on my leg and says *my God, what happened?* and I keep quiet. We are quiet and still together, still. Double digits. What are we doing? This question I ask so often, these words I mean to keep to myself have dripped out every few weeks for some time now. I don't know, he says.

I am speaking slowly in response to his explanations for why it is ok that he is not pulling his weight, reciprocating. *I've always been honest with you, from the beginning*, he tells me, *I have told you that I am no rock, that I cannot be a rock for another.* I am spinning

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through my frustrations and lost, squeak out, "that's fucked up." I hear the front door open downstairs and his roommate's fast feet skipping up the six flights. I am shuffling through a drawer for shorts. I get back on the mattress and cover myself with the yellow bed sheet. A door slams. His roommate's voice is loud. His back flops against the mattress. He is quiet. His roommate tells us we missed quite a party, something really fun. His roommate says goodnight to us and closes his own bedroom door. It was too loud for him. He yells. He tells his roommate that he and I should just sleep together, that his roommate is drunk and is being too loud, that he is drunk, that everyone is making him angry. Something his roommate has said makes me laugh and I shake in hysterics for a few minutes. I try to resume conversation when I've calmed down and instead he tells me to leave him alone. I tell him I'm going home. It's after midnight. I put my clothes on and go into the next room. I unplug my electronics, take my food out of his refrigerator and put them in the grocery bag I got earlier. It is as heavy as the three year old I babysit. I see him smoking by the window in his room. I am loud putting my shoes on. Light from the street illuminates his face. He does not look in my direction. I open the door and look again. He is not looking. I say good-bye more loudly than I usually say anything, and let the door slam. I wait outside for shuffling of feet, or murmurs between him and his roommate. Nothing. I walk quickly down the stairs, loud again. I hold the groceries to my chest. They are cold, I am gracious. On his stoop I look up at his window. Nothing. On the sidewalk I look up at his window. Nothing. On the sidewalk I look at the door to his building. Nothing. I walk down the street and look back when I get to the corner. Nothing. I call him when I get to the subway. He says *get home safe*. He doesn't like that I left and that I then called. He doesn't like that I called. He tells me he is going to lose his mind if he doesn't get off the phone. He did not stop me from leaving. He tells me I am free.

The sun is rising now.

