

My Love For You Is Real

by Johnny Dantonio

Caroline's heels hollow against the floor as she comes back from the bathroom after sex. Her boyfriend has already fallen asleep. She is relieved. She drapes herself in a makeshift tube dress of sheets.

They have dated since they were younger, and she says "I miss you," but knows they'll never marry.

A comb of hair stamps the strands to her sweating forehead, the wisps meandering behind her ear. She sits up and turns down a late night Sportscenter; a dragon lullaby. Picking up her laptop, her bent knees create a leg-desk and she begins to catalog tomorrow's to-do-list as a borrowed wireless connection fails over and over.

Being a flight attendant equated escape. Tuesday's and Thursday's were back and forth's from Nashville to Midway, and on every other week, the night ended in Chicago for the overnight. She frequented the Radisson Hotel Bar when she got in, usually succeeding in her search for someone to pull her hair before she'd fall asleep in a strange place.

She'd be gone when they wake in the morning.

Wednesdays and, like tonight, Mondays, were back to Bryan. He thought he was en route to financial comfort as a financial planner, but Caroline never asked about his work day. In fact, the routine seemed obligatory to her.

He is naked and snoring, laid face down and away, next to her. He loved her; and always had.

She sucks her bottom lip while a slow signal delays online celebrity gossip. Her stiff nipples cling to the cold, thin sheets. She fans her brow with a closed-eyed, upward breath. She stares at the whispers of sports highlights while waiting, anxiety resonating, thinking about the early morning to come.

He'd want to shower together in the morning.

Eyes-wide and unfocused, her imagination wanders when she hears a rhythmic, soft knock in the apartment below. They usually

were both up at this hour, her and the boy beneath. Well, the boy she had created in her mind, anyway.

She had heard him for months now, later at night than earlier. A voice in fucking, singing, crying, laughing; she created a fireside friendship with the imagery, smiling invitingly to anyone she might catch in the elevator throughout the week that might fill his silhouette.

Frustrated with the connection, she folds her computer and slides onto her right shoulder preparing for sleep, her back toward Bryan, her eyes watching the way the television light flickers against the white wall inches from her face. She drags her fingernails from her ribcage to her hip and back, igniting a gentle rising of skin. Her mother used the technique when she was a child to help her sleep.

The pulse of the headboard-to-wall connection quickens downstairs, and though she can't hear it, she imagines a girl whispering, "I love you," while reaching back to grab the flexed buttocks of a lover in orgasm.

Adrian lay in bed like a stereotypical patient: an inverted 'L' across from a shrink. His laptop is hot on his bare chest, chin tucked to his throat while typing to pass the insomnia. He rocks up and down, creating the resounding tapping, listening to some song that reminds him of loneliness.

Earlier, he teared up; a toilet flush above followed by a funeral march back to bed was remnant of something. He had closed his eyes when the heels hit the hardwood, their bass exacerbating and matching his heartbeat.

As the quietness resettles, Adrian writes about the noises above, but refuses to insert himself in the situation, grabbing friends and co-workers as characters. Fragmented writing underlined by computer-correcting worm-lines become catalyst to lay still and put the computer away for the night.

His eyes to the ceiling, he waits for them to get heavier. Time doesn't help. His finger pads draw serpentine nothings upon his stomach and he paints a picture of a girl upstairs asleep, her lover softly kissing down her spine.

Eventually, maybe regrettably, he falls into a slumber; unhappy and uncommitted to things, convoluted and convexed into a shape to epitomize everything.

Caroline smiles before reaching out to touch a shapeless shadow dancing on the wall, closing her eyes as the bumps in the primer serve brail to oncoming dreams.

