

Your Mystery

by Matt Kang

Once upon a time an angelic voice sighed carefree words to me in the hush of night. We were both naked and breathing heavy, then. Her fragrant flesh, I remember it vividly, was so warm and soft on my hands as I felt the glowing lines of her back. There was a small scar there, and when my hand ran over it she held her breath and looked at me, birdlike. Like I would judge that. Like I would criticize a messed up brush stroke on the Mona.

"I love you," I breathed into the nape of her neck.

My words evaporated off of her, her breath turning inward and then she gave the smallest shudder. Her voice changed when she said the next words that sealed me in, the bricks laid out in front of me, syllable by syllable.

"I don't think...we should keep seeing each other."

* * *

Maybe it was because I was just leaving college in Ithaca. Maybe it was because she was just starting. Maybe it was because she was scared to hear her words reciprocated so easily. I don't know. I'll never know.

What keeps me wondering is that she started it all. All of it. She got me drunk, even though I didn't want to. I focused on her lime-green shirt the whole night. The last time I met her I said I thought it was nice.

That's how it started.

She told me she loved me the first night I met her; the next night she confessed every feeling and every secret, no matter how terrible

and dense it was. I still remember looking down at her, the tears rolling off her face to the bed as she spoke slowly, my hands and ears trying to catch both from falling.

Like a switch flicked she was on top, eyes feral, and I fell under her spell. "You're mine now," she kept saying to me, panting in exhilaration. That night her friends and mine were passed out—stone drunk—on the couch and floor of the other room. I still don't know how much they heard, but I still see sly looks emerge on their faces when I bump into them.

We saw each other a couple times afterward, and lust was the fertilizer in which our relationship grew. The moment she saw me she would attack my mouth and my body like I did a great injustice to her. Passion seethed from her pale skin like the vapors that came from our sighs the one night we were making love in the back of my car in a vacant lot on the outskirts of my college. "Stop here, right under the streetlight." I remember her telling me that. She said she wanted to see my face as I put it in.

After we finished, she smiled at me in her underwear, arched her back like a ballerina, and used the tip of her index finger to trace the words "Mark likes to f-*star-star*-k!" in the fog of my back window. She actually drew the little stars in the last word—she only cursed when she was mad. Or excited.

She cursed at the end, when our texts turned from gold nuggets of affection into angry silver bullets. They boiled down to me asking "Why?" and a long pause and her texting back "I don't fucking know!".

Every sweet word she had said to me have become sharp, pointy pricks that play on repeat in my mind and attack my heart at every recall. I twinge when I hear a voice that resembles hers; At the Cinemark I saw on a movie poster a monster the exact shade of

green as her shirt and I moaned aloud and people stared. I mean, I have to leave the room when I hear a love song that at one point in my life I would have laughed at. I've been sleeping *most* nights with terrible visions of forest-green eyes that focus on my soul and then look away and then dark, foreign hands are groping at pale flesh. I sometimes wake myself up at five in the morning and find my pillow all bunched up because I embraced it too hard.

On the final drive home from college someone cut me off, and I braked hard, cursing. Her lip balm (Burt's Bees) rolled onto my passenger's side mat. A relic of that streetlight night.

I pulled over. I took it in my hands and used it on my lips. The taste was just hers: her touch, her smell, her breath in the winter nights.

She was in this. Everything we had was in this tube.

I chucked it out into the winter air without even a sentimental glance, and drove off with white knuckles firmly on the wheel, my life and the road behind and in front of me.

Sometimes I imagine her lip balm resides a couple feet off of a bridge somewhere on I-81, lying in a crater of snow at the foot of a gray, leafless tree. The picture of the old man printed around the tube—Burt, I guess is his name—fades in each passing day.

I also imagine, when the snow melts, and the first breath of spring comes, a squirrel resting in the hollow of that tree will wake up. It'll peer outside kind of sheepishly, the rush of each passing car making it pull back a little bit before coming out. Eventually the furry bystander will look down at the scattered ground, and, there, lying beneath a pile of twigs, it will see a faded yellow something that no species on this earth could fully understand.

