On Desire

by XXXX

For two days his parents had been fighting, and they would tell him to tell the other one something every morning that was supposed to be some sort of slight at their personal failings, which had been inflamed by their twenty years of marriage.

“Tell your mother,” said his father over the table at breakfast, “that the eggs are runny, as always,” and when he would do so, his mother would tell him, “Tell your father to go fuck himself, because that's all he's been able to do,” and he would decide here to keep this one to himself, or rather scream into his pillow and hope the sheer force of his voice resonanting around his skull would be enough to shake off the images of that statement.

It was because his dad came home late one evening after dinner with “the boys,” and while intoxicated confessed to his mother that she, to him, had looked like a sad, lumpy bag of coal ever since their last anniversary, when she forced him to go on some vacation where they were had to do things new couples were supposed to do, and in that private island, surrounded by the happiness of other people, he invariably felt his own misery in bas relief, clearer than when it had been surrounded by the tacit misery of others at work and at home.

He was in his room, having been woken by his dad's screaming, and to fall back asleep he took some magazines he had stolen from his friend's brother from under the bed and touched himself, and his fantasies included not only some naked lady from the magazine he liked very much but also visions of many other places whose theme were simply “not-here,” and in some of them he wasn't even making love to her, he was simply standing there, happier.

During lunch period one day some girl walked up to him where he sat alone and asked if she could sit there. There was nowhere else to

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sit. He said yes. They spoke and found mutual admiration in music, and they spoke for so long their food got cold. She gave him her email address and asked him to send her some of the music he spoke of. During math he failed the quiz because between numbers two and three he had been paralyzed by the elation of that encounter.

When he got home, on a beeline for the computer, he heard cries from inside his parent's bedroom. From the crack of the open door he saw his father holding on to his mother's hair, who cried and asked he stop it. He ran out of the house, and for most of the evening spent it at a friend's, where he wrote a nice little email, with understated conversation starters, and links to his favorite songs he thought she might like.

When he got home for dinner, his mother's eyes were sunken and his father was away. While they ate, his mother began crying. “He beat me,” she said. “What can I do? He beat me.” He touched her shoulder, but when he did she straightened her back and continued eating.

“Don't tell anyone about this,” she said. “Never tell anyone about it.”