

Hannah Rubin

“The Many People Wanted Something Different, or Better, or The Same”

My gut tastes like seltzer, the kind with syrup, and I’m sitting in my car in the garage underneath our apartment. Just pulled in. Brain fizzing out like something day-old. Earlier, I was weaving through a crowd, bumping into as many people as I could, and someone yelled out, “who’s your choreographer!?”

I liked that. Letting it feel like a dance. My pants are too tight, have had to un-button and re-button them every time I’ve gone to sit and then stand. No one ever says anything but I don’t think it’s because they don’t notice. Being respectful or something. I’d rather them point and laugh, it’s worth laughing at—the matter of the pants being too tight and the feeling of the stomach being so pressed in upon. I thought she was going to come over but she just texted to say she isn’t, which has me feeling a little tone deaf and mostly sad. Maybe that’s why I’m sitting in my car underneath the apartment building, and not walking up the blue staircase to get into the room that knows me best, lying back on the bed, maybe with a candle lit. Taking off these damn pants. I guess it was my choice—could have stayed out later, went to the fifth and sixth bar. But after a five cheese sandwich and a third margarita, it passes me by. Everything returns to static remember? Suddenly I’m back again. In the non-place. I rarely remember, so I really won’t ask it of you, I promise. It’s more like that terrible thing we were talking about yesterday where I tried to make something feel like art and instead I was thick in a dream and scratching off pieces of skin.

You weren’t very motherly. And I loved you with a ferocity I’m still recovering from. Each moment of silliness, like a scalpel slowly turning inside the thinnest layer of my skin. You cut me! You cut me with your love! Your love! It’s taken me 28 years to care about the word love—that is how you mothered me. Everyone was suspicious except for you. And you scrubbed me in the bathtub, had me step up onto the toilet, with one leg up on the sink. So you could rub desitin onto my hooaha, when it burned. You said I could call it VJ, because the big word was too big. And this way, in a house of brothers, it could be our little secret. Sometimes I begged you to brush my teeth for me, wash my face. I didn’t have any pimples for you to squeeze, but I did try to get you to fall asleep in my bed each night. Waiting so still, for your breath to get hot and foul smelling, that subtle shift in how the air was passing through the openings of your face. I wanted you forever. I didn’t get to have you all day, most of the night. You came home like a gust of wind, opening the door with a million bags, blustering from room to room, steady as you progressed up the stairs, to your bedroom, where you insisted you be alone—sometimes before you’d even let me hug you. You were wearing your work clothes, you needed to change out of them. Then make tea. Then eat. I’m not sure if you ever asked me, even then, about my day. I’m not trying to depict you bad, I just can’t recall.

Yesterday, I was transported. An experience of such intense exhaustion that everything feels part of a confusing and hard-to-parse delirium. I fell asleep in the bathtub, but I'm not sure. I could have been lying there, under the water raining out of my shower head, the weight of my skin pressing silkily against the tub's dirty porcelain, for two hours. I only remember the skin of my stomach, the droplets of water bouncing. An oceanic numbness, my brain empty-full-empty-full. When I got out and checked the wall clock in the kitchen, it had only been fifteen minutes. I screamed *Colby are you pranking me?* because maybe they had swung the hands backwards a few rounds, but they weren't even home yet. Perhaps they had come in and left without me even noticing, but it felt unlikely—given that the pile of mail on the dining room table with their name on it had been untouched. I was disoriented. Now it is later. My feet feel cold in a robust and draining way. My chest feels heavy. Tight, tight, heavy. I feel bad. Like a good-for-nothing. Maybe, if only, a nap. But it feels, keeps feeling, like there's too much that needs doing. This thing and that thing. I feel tired. Maybe I could go cut a piece of wood. And what would that do? I'm scared. Tired and scared. Of this coming unleashing. So many details—how do people pull it together? There are so many details, I feel cold, impermeably cold, hot hot air, so so cold. Nothing feels urgent but sleep. But sleep. But sleep. So much to do. Can't even remember one single thing.

