

# Chicago

aoife marlowe

I reconnected with Sophie in December 2024. We had fallen out of touch before I moved to Michigan. She took the train down from Chicago for our New Year's Eve party. I had sent Sophie an invite in the mail, though I didn't expect her to come. I sent a lot of invitations to distant friends that year. She was going to stay a couple of days with us. My partner Phoebe's closest friends were coming, minus the one with constant car trouble. All the other folks I had invited ended up flaking the day of the party.

Sophie knew just what to say to me. I had spent the last month party planning, digging through film forums to put on our wall of old tube tv's, looking on Souseek and Bandcamp for music to put on the main speakers, and for imitation radio programming that loops through a tinny speaker in the bathroom. It has bumpers and a call sign and everything. Sophie told me the music's vibe always matched what she saw on the televisions, and that the experience was beautiful and cohesive. She complimented my taste for almost every track that she heard. Sophie and I stayed up practically all night, first with Phoebe's friend Ryan, learning that t4t transmascs have the same handful of fetishes the girls do. Then it was just Sophie and I, switching control of the bluetooth speaker after

and between songs. It became a fifty-six hour party. I got her drunker than she'd been in months, and we split a cigarette. We realized neither of us liked nicotine much on its own, so she rolled us a spliff from a Lucky Strike and some cheap weed. "It's so nice to smoke tobacco. I don't really like how it makes me feel but it reminds me of the men I love."

"I think it's really low vibrational. This whole weekend is really low vibrational."

Sophie said it was actually a compliment. It'd have been clear to me if I actually understood music or physics.

I dropped Sophie off at the train station at 8 am before getting ready for work. She didn't hug me goodbye.

I met Sophie at first when I was twenty, she was seventeen or eighteen. Sophie was the awkward noise musician my friend Rachel—who I had met through a guy she was cheating on her girlfriend with—was cheating on her *new* girlfriend with. They went to a private college a little over an hour from my parents' place. I drove out there to see shows at least once a month. Sophie and Rachel came to the basement raves I ran in Cleveland with the two men I love. Sophie was the kind of skinny you worry about. Rachel liked to call Sophie butch, but I think it just meant Sophie wore wifebeaters and baggy pants.

I fell in love with Phoebe right before I turned 21. It was honest to god love for the first time. It was simple and natural, and it felt good. It was obsessive and consuming too. It was right before Covid hit, and then we had all the time in the world to be obsessed. We met on Twitter, even though we both had plenty of friends in the same DIY and local art scenes before Phoebe moved to the West Coast.

Sophie started seeing Ash six months later, while she was still dating Rachel, because they had become kind of poly. Becoming kind of poly is a good way to stop dating someone when you're young and there's a lot of feelings involved but love doesn't exactly seem to be one of them.

Phoebe and I were online only long distance for a year; and then we bought plane tickets to visit one another twice. They moved back in with their parents in West Michigan to build up a portfolio for MFA applications. I drove up from Cleveland plenty of times our second year together. They were accepted into a few programs. We considered living in Athens, Ohio, but decided to move to Lansing in the end because Michigan State offered Phoebe a higher stipend.

Domestic living was sweet and safe. I started hormones. Outside of the house we were poor and bored. I was used to

being poor and bored, so it was fine. Making friends got harder as I looked started looking more transsexual, and then keeping the few I'd made got harder, and then I was in Lansing alone, except for my wife and our cat named Puppy. I got a job before I changed my name legally and got stuck working retail for \$14 an hour with \$1,300 rent. Once my documents were in order I couldn't find a place willing to so much as interview me. I saw my friends from Cleveland when they could make time to travel. Nobody from back home had a place for me to crash, so the visiting was one-way. These weekend stays sometimes had a party thrown around them. These parties became my lifeline, socially and for everything else.

I started going to DIY shows my second summer in Lansing. I didn't make many long term friends in the scene. I only keep in touch with the girl I met who used to work doors at The Ave. It's the closest thing we've got to a gay bar. She ended up getting fired over nothing after getting her paycheck stiffed for a few weeks. Heather was twenty-nine then. She hasn't had steady work since. I met girls before and after her too, but our relationships always seemed to follow a pattern. They'd be interested and flirty, and then pushy or grabby, and I would be cold, and hope they'd pick up on the vibe. I got two or three months of hanging out with some girls before they'd lose interest.

Even with women, I feel like I'm just a thing to use. I knew this would happen. I'm just tits and ass and hole and implied dick. When people want to fuck me now they don't even try to make me feel beautiful. I think I would give it up so easy if a girl told me I was pretty. With a transsexual you can assume that she's just for fucking because that's all how everyone else treats and talks about her anyways. I know these girls get treated the same way. It never turns into friendship for me. We don't fuck and no matter what I lose contact. It's sleepless nights thinking I should've let her use me and I only have to get her off once or twice. Maybe she can talk to me in between, and maybe she only needs to try me once anyways. She's girls where I'm having a good night and then she interrupts me talking about a new album and she'll tell me she gets big and hard. They don't always say they get big and hard exactly. Instead they say it's "fully functional" with "no shrinkage". They just let that sit there like I'm supposed to stop thinking about anything else except getting fucked by their cocks, and they don't even ask you. She's girls where I am in her bed and am feeling safe with her and with someone new for the first time in so long and I say "It's so nice you don't just want to have sex with me". She stops responding to my texts, and won't even look at me in public.

It's not like it's easier with men. There are the two men I love, the brunette who works in stained glass and the blonde who works with steel. They are beautiful and good to me, they smell like strong dark pipe tobacco mixed with sweat, and they cough black. I don't get approached in public unless an interested man doesn't see anyone else around. The nicest man I see is my older coworker. He tells me I should be wearing thigh highs or stockings and garters with a micro skirt, and maybe some lacy lingerie, instead of my work uniform. He asks me if I know about S&M, and he said some girls like to get hurt when they get fucked, and sometimes he'll watch the porn where it happens, even though it isn't his thing. He feels bad for the girls who like it. He tells me sometimes he likes to watch the porn where women get stuck and can't get out, and they don't always call it rape, but he likes to watch it when they call it rape. "Some girls like that kind of thing" with a lilt at the end. It's almost a question. He is still the kindest man I see. He has minded our cat named Puppy before and he will sometimes not say those things to me for a month or two, and he asks about me and seems to actually care. I can't let myself think about how he is the only man here who treats me like a person.

After the party, Sophie and I started texting all the time. I love to text and think it might be one of the best inventions maybe ever. I have a high words-per-minute and that's part of it

but I also think writing your thoughts out can be easier than talking. I had texted a lot before, in intense long distance friendships and romances. I used to think this was about the novelty of getting to know someone and that's how it feels. Now I worry my texting habit might be obsessive or malignant. Sophie and I texted maybe more and for longer than I had with anyone else except Phoebe. I could text as much as I wanted because I was underpaid and I hated my job. Nobody ever said anything to me at work. Sophie had been dating Ash for almost five years and had been calling Ash her wife forever, so I figured I wouldn't have to worry about her getting a crush or wanting to have sex with me.

It was nice and good and simple and comfortable. She made me feel juicy, which is my favorite translation of the Avestan word *frasha*. It's about something being so overflowing with this life renewing energy that you could bite into it and your hand would be covered in sweet sticky nectar. It's used in a lot of Zoroastrian texts, and it's about purifying and restoring something back to a perfect and pre-corrupted state, like it was at the beginning of time. Sophie knew a lot of music I didn't know and she sent me a ton of it. I tried to send back music she hadn't heard. I listened to every track she sent, which I've never done for anyone else, even still. She was smarter than me about music, and she said the songs I liked were captivating

and cohesive. Sophie had spent her time in undergrad studying experimental music techniques I could never quite understand. She sent demos all the time, and nearly all were better than anything I've finished. It inspired me to try to make music again. I wanted to learn whatever she was doing to make it sound so fresh. We talked a lot about transfeminism too, philosophy, film, and fucking. Sophie and I talked about the type of sex we had with our girlfriends to make us forget the parts of our bodies we didn't want or like. Sometimes I needed to forget I had a body at all.

I didn't know how to touch my pussy before Sophie told me. I knew that I had a pussy now even without surgery, even though I want SRS badly, and realized how bad I wanted it through talking to her. I didn't know how to touch my hardware after I started estrogen. I had had my experiences of sex before estrogen feeling so bad I wouldn't let anyone touch me. On HRT it came back and got worse. Phoebe and I tried but I couldn't figure out how to make my body work like before, and I couldn't sort how it worked on E. Sophie didn't touch me, and it was over text, and it didn't feel like I was asking her how to masturbate. I just wanted to know how to be touched, and she told me, and it was powerful. It all feels very Vagina Monologues, but it was nice to have a friend who was transsexual and to not be alone. The women I knew before I

transitioned were shy to open up with me about their experiences. Sophie and I were close for other reasons, I clicked with her and I loved her. It was too early to say the words 'best friend' to Sophie. I was thinking them about her, and talking about Sophie with Phoebe constantly.

There was a lesbian party in Chicago right before Valentine's Day. It was at a bar near Soph and Ash's spot, and I wanted to visit anyway. I had just started making the tiniest bit more money. It was enough to budget for one trip and a weekend of drinks. They were going to let me crash on their air mattress. It took up the entire living room of their cramped one bedroom apartment.

It was my first time on an Amtrak train. I had visited Anna's Archive the night before, and read four books on that trip, on the train and public transit. It was the first time I had sat down and done a lot of reading since I was in graduate school. I hadn't devoured fiction like I did on that train since I was in my tweens. It felt somehow related to knowing Sophie. She encouraged me to put more time into my interests, helped me feel more confident overall. I didn't mind when Sophie saw me without makeup. I left the house with her, totally unbeat. I hardly let anyone see me without at least a little concealer and color corrector on.

Drinks were expensive and the pool table was covered up. It was busy, but not so packed we couldn't move. Sophie and Ash and I danced until the music stopped, which was earlier than we expected. The night ended up being mostly drag king performances. Ash, who was used to waking up at 6:30 for her 9 to 5, left early. Sophie and I stayed for a few more rounds together before going home.

I had breakfast with Sophie the next day, and then she left for work. I got lunch with Ash, who was a lot more confident than the last time I had seen her. Chicago or time had helped her out of her shell. I took the bus back to the train station after. Sophie got off work early and met me there. The weekend had felt short. We hugged goodbye. When I got on the train she apologized for being a bad hugger.

“You'll have plenty more chances to hug me angel”

## II

My relationship with Phoebe was on the rocks. They were finishing up their MFA. It was close to over, but the last few months of the program were demanding. It started to feel like I was running the household, and then I was running an empty house. We stopped going on dates, and stopped having sex, and then I got used to falling asleep without them, while they spent late nights at the studio. Sophie, who had her own busy life, was always making time for me. Her own relationship was suffering and I can't be sure how much of it was Soph and Ash's pre-existing relationship issues, and how much it was my relationship with Soph. Sophie talked about moving me to Chicago, how she would set me up with a job and I could live on the floor while I waited for Phoebe to finish up school. It was a peculiar dream but she promised Ash was fine with it. I half wanted it myself.

In early March I visited Chicago again, there was a furry function at somebody's loft. Sophie badly wanted to go. She told me Ash wasn't interested, tickets were costly and it was going to run late. I took the train up again. We listened to 100 geecs' "ringtone" as we got ready. I had customized my vibration pattern for Sophie, like I had done for Phoebe years earlier.

It was on the fourth floor of an apartment building and it was packed. I wasn't 26 yet and I was the oldest one there. We would've danced longer but I could see the floor bowing from all the hardstyle jumping. We spent most of the night outside, her smoking Virginia Slim Blue 120's and me holding a lit cig when she wasn't puffing on it. They're about the same width as regular cigs but extra dextra long. They make me feel sexy and cunt, even if smoking mostly makes me cough. Sophie was wearing a metal collar with decorative chains her girlfriend had bought her off Chewy, and some eyeliner she'd smudged on.

"It's a shame Ash's not here or I'd ask to scratch behind your ears."

"...You still could."

"It's no fun to scratch a puppy's ears if its owner isn't there.

Sorry angel."

I used to go to a lot of puppy/daddy nights at the Leather Stallion, back when there were techno events in Cleveland that would play stuff like Perctrax. They'd have a hot genderfuck fagdyke carrying a platter of Double Scorpio bottles, free to sniff. I saw a lot of tender faggotry there before it got transphobic, and then I saw awfully tender faggotry between a handful of girls I knew who wouldn't think of leaving the house without an O-ring on their necks. After I split town the O-ring

girls all split up. Since moving, I had been trying to get Ryan to take me to a puppy night in Detroit. I wanted to tell the pups how handsome they were, how good and well trained they were; so I could touch someone I wasn't going to fuck, who wasn't allowed to fuck me.

Sophie looked super cute in her collar. When I hit poppers I was transfixed, thinking of pulling her into my chest by the ring of her collar and telling her what a sweet puppy she was. Sophie said she liked how I acted tipsy, that I got more assertive, almost demanding, and that I was teasing her more. I liked it too, of course, or I wouldn't have acted like it. It was nice to see her smiling. She danced close to me and sang all the words to every Bladee song that played.

Around midnight a support column below the floor broke. The door person was still taking tickets. We had been hoping to stay until bus service resumed in the morning. Sophie shivered at the bus stop in her miniskirt, and held tight onto me on the bus.

In the morning Sophie asked me to do her shot. She had got there first two done by nurses at the clinic the weeks prior, and had been on pills before. She got needles and syringes from the pharmacy instead of from a veterinary supply,

which is probably how it's supposed to work anyways. She's skinny still. I'd have to grab her to figure out where the fat's hiding and where the needle is supposed to go. Ash doesn't say anything as Sophie takes her shorts off and asks if I should use her tummy or her thighs.

"Angel, I think you should do it yourself."

Sophie looks at me a little disappointed. I'm a little disappointed too. She needed a lot of affirmation and instruction, and she pushed the needle in real slow—the kind I think that makes the penetration hurt more. She put on a Kuromi bandage I bought her. I gently touched my index and middle finger to her knee.

"You were really brave angel, you did good".

Sophie didn't take time off for me when I visited except for the specific hours a function was running, so she was scheduled that afternoon and evening. Ash and I went to Dorothy, a lesbian cocktail lounge. I mostly drink the cheapest beer on draft at bars, but I figured I deserved something better at a nice place. I'd only had a martini before at a dive bar in Cleveland where the bartender asked me how to make it. I figured if I had money for one drink, just liquor and liqueur and

olive brine would do me fine. I ordered it extra dirty. Ash ordered a Cosmopolitan. It was her first ever cocktail, age 23. Both of our drinks came in these beautiful coupe glasses, the kind of glasses I've been looking for forever. It felt a little like I was hanging out with a nineteen year old at the same time as hanging out with an old friend. She talked about the books she was reading and that she loved seeing me and missed seeing Phoebe and I. I talked about how proud I was of her and Soph as a couple, in a big city with a tiny apartment. They had a little money to waste if they kept their eyes on it, and love in spades.

After Sophie got off work, Ash and I took the bus to Rainbo. It's Sophie's favorite dive bar. Ash asked me if you can order cocktails at the bar even if they aren't on the menu. It was cash only. I got the cheapest beer on draft, and Sophie did too. Ash got another Cosmo and asked me what was in it.

"I think I might love triple sec."

Around 11:30 Ash left the bar but assured us repeatedly we shouldn't come home till we were tired. We stepped out for a spliff made of Chicago weed, which costs more than Michigan's, and Virginia Slim sweetened tobacco, rolled by Sophie. It is sweetened, I don't know if you knew that. A lot of cigarettes have sugar in them, I never knew. I never had to roll

my own anything either. I've always had beautiful women around to keep me from learning. Sophie and I hit poppers before going back in. Red faced and giggly, we found an empty booth.

"I really love to be with you. It's nice that I don't have to worry about coming off too flirty because you've got Ash. I think it's kind of healing to just be friends with a girl. I haven't had that in a while."

"Yeah. I mean, I love you too. It makes sense girls want to fuck you though. You're like, really hot."

"Girl. I think you should drop it."

I had five beers that night. Sophie only had three, but she's more of a lightweight than I am. We smoked more, she did most of the work. I got a few cute pictures of her sucking on a spliff and smiling just holding it.

"I do like that you let yourself act bitchy with me."

"You think I'm a bitch?"

"Yeah I think it's part of our dynamic. You're a bitch and you bully me."

"I don't... I don't think of it like that. I like to tease you, but it's fun and pretend and I love you. Do you really think I'm a bitch?"

“It’s part of your swag. You’re like a dominant bitchy older woman. It’s really hot.”

“You think I’m older? I’m twenty five. You’re like two years younger than me.”

“You felt older than me when we met. You’ve always been so hot. You were kind of dominant back then too.”

“I don’t think I’m being dominant with you. It’s nice to be a lot. I just want something normal with you. This feels normal for me.”

“I’m not asking to do anything.”

“I think saying something is asking to do something angel.”

“Whatever.”

And at this point I was a little heartbroken.

“...But you do like. You kind of own my body and mind.”

“Girl. I can’t.”

We went home soon after. She apologized a few times on the way back. I was mostly quiet.

Phoebe told me Sophie was probably drunk and didn’t know what she was saying, and that we could talk about what happened when I got back home. They told me to focus on my trip and to just have fun for the rest of my weekend. I thought I might have to cut Sophie off. She held onto me tight the whole day, and laid her head on my shoulder. I figured she’d freak if I brought anything up. I told Soph we probably looked like we

were dating on the train, two t-girls holding one another. Sophie got defensive and told me to drop it. I didn't wear makeup the whole day. She said she had practiced hugging a lot when she said goodbye, it was awfully cute. I noticed a difference. I told her she felt nice.

I freaked out about everything at home, and Phoebe consoled me.

It was around the anniversary of when I had cut off my ex-boyfriend, who was one of my closest friends after we broke up. When we were dating, he was mean to me. We fucked all the time. He would get mad when I talked to his friends, and I was in a new city, so I basically lived in his bedroom. He would put me down in private too. When I moved back home, he switched his act up. He started to be incredibly sweet and built me up, and I really needed it, even if I was only diminished by him in the first place. He got a new boyfriend, and told me that his new boyfriend's dick was smaller than mine, even though I never topped him, and that the sex was much worse. I was insecure and vain and selfish, and I liked to hear that someone thought I was desirable.

I started dating Phoebe. He started dating a new girl. I started taking E. When I wanted attention or felt undesirable, I'd

send him nudes. He was obsessed with me, and I let myself half know it. I wanted to feel fuckable and I didn't want him to fuck me. We talked about art and philosophy and petty scene drama, even though we lived in different states. He visited us for in Michigan for a weekend. He was cold and rude to Phoebe. He looked at me different when I brought them up. He drove back to Minneapolis on Saturday night, and didn't talk to me for a week. He texted me later, and told me that he couldn't handle being just friends anymore. He didn't like Phoebe because he loved me and wanted to be with me. He said estrogen had made me hotter than ever, that he couldn't hold his feelings back anymore. I blocked his number. I had thought before the visit that he was going to be at my future wedding. I felt like a manipulator and I felt like meat.

I confided in Sophie about this. She said it brought up feelings she had for me. I got scared and said this was a pattern and there must be something wrong with me that it keeps happening and I don't know how to make friends; maybe nobody ever just likes how I am, and everyone only wants me for my body.

“I’m sorry that I feel this way.

I think you might understand my body and wants more than Ash does. You do something to me.

I’ve always wanted an older trans woman to control my life, since I was a teen.

I want to be normal to you.”

Sophie apologized, and I trusted her that she meant she was working on it. I wouldn’t have stayed her friend without believing her. I needed a week of consolation from Phoebe to believe that I could even make a friend at all. I think Phoebe wanted me to have a normal friendship as badly as I did. Sophie started smoking cigarettes, which I think was entirely my fault. I am in my heart an enabler. Sophie said I’d be awful at controlling her life because I’d let her do anything.

“I should be put in a black cube and tortured.

I should be put in the wilderness away from everyone.

I can’t be normal to anyone who loves me.

I should be chemically castrated or killed.”

“Angel, I love you. We both know that isn’t true. I’m not even mad at you. I believe you’ll work on it and our relationship might be different for a while, but I love you. That’ll stick and we’ll still be friends.”

I comforted Sophie about it for days after. I told Soph she’d need to tell Ash about the situation between us. Sophie told Ash she had developed a crush on me but that it was already over by the time they had the discussion about it. I didn’t know for months that Sophie had said so little about it to Ash. I wanted to forget Soph had said I owned her, probably more than she did.

### III

Sophie wasn't taking care of herself. Maybe she never had. Soph said Rachel had masculinized her, cut her hair short, and talked her out of form-fitting clothes. It was one of those situations where the cis girl is actually a trans guy in the closet with damage who is going to punish you for being a woman. Maybe Sophie had taken care of herself in high school, I never asked for pictures. Ash and Soph had become a hikikomori couple in college. When I visited their apartment in February the whole spot looked like a depression cave. Sophie had never established any sort of self care routine. Ash mostly always looked put together, but I think gave up on trying to get Sophie to take care of herself. I imagine it is so much more tiring to be persistent as a girlfriend than to be ignored as a friend.

As Soph lost interest in Ash, she started to depend on me. I didn't notice it was happening until it had been for weeks. I hated to think of Sophie ever being sad, and only wanted to tend to her. She started moisturizing and washing her face, at my insistence. A week later she started applying sunscreen daily. She felt really young and impressionable. I'll never get to see my children learn to take care of themselves like this. I doubt she knew how much I liked feeling like her mother. Sophie talked about wanting to be a puppy for someone, to

have an owner. It was, or it became, a big part of her identity that influenced the way she moved through the world. I wasn't seeing Phoebe enough, I was doing the cooking and cleaning. When I did see Phoebe I was distant, and I projected the distance back onto them. I was getting deadnamed at work. Sophie was texting me I love you good morning's and I love you good night's, and I sent them back, or sent them first.

Sophie needed so much from me. She'd take up all my time with Phoebe and all my time without. Her language changed, and mine did too. I hardly thought anything of it. She wasn't just angel anymore, she was puppy too.

"You're such a brave dog for going to work at 4 AM"

She talked about needing to be poly, and to be fucked differently by her wife. I wanted something similar. I was scared for other girls to touch me, and I couldn't figure out how I wanted to be touched by my wife. I needed someone who knew how to handle me.

Sophie started saying Ash was a chaser, that she only dated Soph for her girl dick, and that she mostly put up with dating Soph for the sex. I know Ash really loved Sophie. I think she still does. I don't know how Ash fucks, or what she likes

and how. As far as I know, she hasn't dated or fucked another trans girl before or since Soph. I figure a real tranny chaser could get her numbers up. Sophie told me she couldn't stand dating Ash anymore, over and over again. It was exhausting to hear, and it was most of what she talked about with me for weeks. To keep this kind of feeling from your partner for a while is torture, I told her, I think to you and her. It can be easier to make a victim and a villain as you break up. Just falling out of love can be the hardest thing.

One night Sophie asked Ash if they could do the petplay thing in public, maybe at a gay club. Ash said she was interested. Sophie told Ash it might be time to start thinking about proposing. She brought up the sex thing the next weekend. They had been talking about getting married since Trump was re-elected. She asked about opening their relationship the next evening.

"We're breaking up then. I can't stand the thought of you being with someone else."

Sophie was mad at Ash for refusing her.

Sophie downloaded Grindr, Feeld, and Lex. She found out about Sniffies two days later and started looking there too.

She and Ash were fucking again. Sophie hoped to start having sex with other people and keep fucking Ash until she got her own place. You can't, I told her, on a sexual ethics level and because of health stuff.

"She still loves you. You can't take advantage of that."

I felt a lot older than her here, she had never had casual sex before, and I had had a lot of casual sex as self harm in my teens. Everything I did before starting estrogen, and especially everything I did as a teenager, feels like I only did it to destroy myself.

Sophie seemed like she was relying on me less. We talked just as often, but she seemed more confident. She switched her hair routine and started dressing more feminine. Her injections were working. I could see her breasts growing in pictures she'd send me. I'd send her pictures of my outfits too. I knew she wanted me by then. I liked it. Sophie said she liked getting bullied, and I liked doing it to her. I was telling her I'm just teasing her and that I'm not bullying her because I'm not being mean, and bullying feels mean. Teasing is just fun. I think tension can be more enjoyable than action, and I didn't want her besides. It can be fun to playact tension and desire. Flirting feels safe like fucking just doesn't.

Sophie visited in May for my birthday, she came down the day before the party. She was a lot more confident as a single woman than she had been with Ash. It was endearing to see her so happy. Phoebe was at a gallery opening in Cleveland that night. Sophie and I went to the Ave and only had two drinks each. She mostly watched me play pinball, and then we played Street Fighter: Third Strike. She lost. It was close. We smoked outside, and walked home with a cigarette. I held it when she wasn't puffing. It was sweet.

At home she rolled me a spliff, and walked me through inhalation. We put on an early episode of Buffy, one where she was still in high school. Soph laid against me.

"Do you mind if I scritch you?"

"I would really like that."

Sophie told me what she wanted in a soft voice, and then went nonverbal. I could hardly talk myself, the experience was really overpowering. It didn't feel like sex at all, only a really natural thing. A girl comforting her stressed dog, and being comforted by its warm body against hers. Sophie barked a little, and whimpered a lot. I couldn't process anything but how nice the repetition of touch was. We were twin animals. I got hard,

and it went away. Later it happened to her too. Neither of us said anything. I think we both noticed.

“You can touch my tummy too, if you’d like.”

Phoebe was back early in the morning. We grabbed coffee from the spot on our street, even though I prefer the further place with the dyke barista. We got lunch at an old burger joint, where you can get an olive burger for four dollars and a regular degular one for just three. I bought a bottle of real Cointreau, not just Triple Sec, and prepared for the party. It was a lot of wiring for sound and visuals, and making a big batch of Cosmopolitans. We put on an episode of the X-Files when the prep was done. It was the one where Jack Black works at an arcade and his small town friend electrocutes people. I cuddled up against Phoebe and Sophie both and made myself as small and warm as possible. I was as close as could be with two people I loved more than anything. It sort of felt like heaven.

Phoebe’s friends came, a heterosexual couple, and Ryan who had been at New Year’s. Sophie was there, and Heather came too. Almost nobody else had responded to my invitations, and fewer still sent me so much as a text on my birthday. I felt like my social world was closing in. It was more like two parties, the trans girls outside and everyone else inside.

The two rarely mixed. Heather and Soph and I smoked slims and spliffs. I felt really celebrated by Sophie, and by Phoebe, who came out a few times. Around one in the morning I realized I had got all dressed up and was looking sexy but hadn't taken any pictures, so I went to the bathroom upstairs to make up for lost time. Heather had left by then. I took pictures of Phoebe and Sophie too. I love all the pictures I've ever taken of people sucking cigarettes on my porch. Just past three, Phoebe told me that they were going to bed. I was staying up late, trying to see the sunrise with Sophie. She and I stayed out for a second on the porch, just talking, and then we went back inside. Ryan and Phoebe's straight friends were sleeping in the living room, so we headed to the spare bedroom. We hugged and held one another as we watched Youtube videos on her phone, and then she was my puppy for a minute. We both started to fall asleep, so I went to my room. Phoebe later told me they were jealous that I fell asleep with Sophie before them. I wished I could have everything I want with no consequence.

Sophie and I woke up soon enough that I wasn't hungover yet. I bought Soph McDonalds breakfast and the biggest black iced coffee they sell. She smoked in the AmTrak parking lot in her oversized camo jacket, and we listened to music on phone speakers. We hugged really tight, and often, and then she was gone.

Sophie gave me a CD for my birthday. It is still the only one I have in my car. She drew our fursonas looking at one another. Hers was a miniature Australian shepherd dog. She said I would be a bat, because I like to stay up late. The therian thing doesn't click with me, but my real life fursona would probably be something embarrassing and cliché and boy, like a silver fox. Soph wrote "HAPPY BIRTHDAY EVE" on the CD in the same angular hand she used to tag PUPPYWORLD on the blue USPS mailbox by our house in bright pink paint marker.

Phoebe was leaving the country for a residency in early June. They'd be in Canada all summer. It was a big opportunity for them, and a little scary for me to think about. I didn't have a passport so I couldn't even plan to see Phoebe. I made plans to visit Sophie instead, to not be alone all summer.

Sophie saw some DJ's she liked were playing at a trans girl centered sex party called Dollhouse. It was at Jackhammer, one of the leather bars in Chicago. She'd pay for tickets for me and it'd be her birthday. She said the best gift I could give her was letting her pay for everything. I can be really generous.

## IV

I wasn't going to go to the back room. Sophie was going to be a dog. She asked if I could be her handler. I said maybe. She asked often. I acquiesced. Conversations about that night dominated my life in early summer. Sophie peppered me with questions about what I could and would do. She would ask for more than I thought I could handle and then I'd say I was uncomfortable. I'd discuss with Phoebe and they'd agree it might be a bit much, and then I'd tell. Sophie told me she was worried I prioritized Phoebe above her, which was true insofar as I was dating Phoebe. I didn't think anything was happening in which I would have to choose between the two of them, or between their happiness. Phoebe felt prioritized below Sophie too. It was nearing the end of Phoebe's time in America until autumn. We were going on walks together, and hikes, and bike rides. They'd be gone for their birthday. I'd be in Chicago anyways, Sophie's was a day after Phoebe's.

I bought Phoebe a custom leather collar as an early birthday present. Sophie got jealous. I spent more time assuring Sophie that everything was okay than I did holding Phoebe in the last few days before they left for Canada.

Phoebe left. I became anxious and touch-starved almost immediately. All I could do was overthink. I told Phoebe I thought we should split. I needed to be able to have sex with other people. We had talked about it before, but hadn't put a label on it, and the conversations had been before we moved in together. I could've fucked other people and I wasn't doing it. Phoebe said we could just stay open or think about our relationship as 'opening', and asked if I could see a future without them. I couldn't. I hadn't wanted to think about sex with other people when I was talking to Sophie all the time, because I didn't want to have sex with her. I had let some desires lay dormant until they started to fester. I couldn't think of a life without Phoebe even as I asked for it. I saw them fall into tears on my laptop screen and I froze. I took it all back.

The only thing I had to look forward to that summer was Chicago. Without Phoebe I felt totally isolated. I had already budgeted most of my disposable income and time off for Sophie. I lived with my earbuds in because my social world was dominated by unfriendly people, customer and coworkers, who constantly were misgendering me, being rude besides and on top of it. I wanted to reach back out to the women in town who had been really awful to me, so anyone would touch me at all, even if I hated it. Sophie told me about all the girls she was fucking, but that she was touch-starved through it all. She

wanted me to buy her a collar and put my name on it, and touch her teeth. She said I could call her a boy if I wanted. I had become dependent on her too.

Sophie's party was at the house of one of the straight men in her Nietzsche book club. She had talked before about how he was mean to her, and so saw her as a woman, because he was nice to the other men. Sophie was going to buy whippets for her twenty fourth birthday, and told me I'd be hitting nitrous in a straight man's house.

I worried about my aftercare needs. It was only going to be my second time touching her, and my first time doing really anything at a sex party. She had moved out of Ash's place by then. Sophie had planned to buy a futon, Japanese style, to lay on the floor. I told her it would render her unfuckable. She tossed her leaky air mattress and bought a real one. She put her new mattress on the floor and planned to buy a frame when she could afford one. She offered to sleep on the ground. I thought it'd be nice to share the bed with a friend.

I couldn't find a cat sitter because everyone we knew had split town for the summer. Phoebe's parents offered to do it. Their house was on the way to Chicago if I drove. It was

more of a headache to drive, but I could get there earlier and leave later.

I made Sophie a CD as a birthday gift. The opening track was a VST preset audio sample, and in my speaking voice “Happy Birthday Soph! I love you.” I bought her an ounce of cheap weed and bandages with paw prints on them. I brought a fresh bottle of poppers too, and some superslim cigarettes, which are daintier and shorter than the ones I normally get. They make me nervous about how big my hands are. I made Sophie a card, using the last of my cream colored paper with really good teeth. Teeth is either a word people who sell paper use to describe the way paper holds onto some kinds of ink, or something I made up, but I really think it isn't my invention. I used a deep seaweed green to write her name special with a narrow italic nib.

“I have really found a home in you. Your Friends Always – Eve”.

At five in the morning that Friday I woke up, got my face ready, and dropped the cat off at Phoebe's folks' place. I drove the rest of the way to Chicago with a can of purple Monster energy, and an empty stomach.

I sat my bags down in the front room of Sophie's empty basement apartment. We were both hungry for lunch. We ate hot dogs at a spot just below a train station. We hit a few thrift stores afterwards. Sophie was looking for a purse. She didn't have a cute bag, and wanted to wear as little clothing as possible to the party. The one she found looked sporty. It fit her style, the athletic look works well with a jockstrap. We headed back to Soph's place afterwards.

We laid together in her bed. We were both touch starved and tired. Falling into a familiar rhythm, Sophie laid her head on my chest. I touched her hair, it was easier to run my fingers through than before. At my insistence, just before she turned 24, she had bought a hairbrush. And then my hands moved, and I was scratching behind her ears. We laid like that for a while. She had freckles I never noticed.

"Why would I put on makeup with skin like this?"

She whimpered. I moved my hand to her stomach. She picked up a new dog toy with her mouth. Sophie had asked if she should buy knee-pads to walk on, and I hadn't fully understood their importance. Seeing her bony legs on the hard

tile floor, it clicked. We played fetch like that for a few minutes. More than before, it felt like I owned her, and all I wanted was to let her put me at ease. I slipped into a mindset of stupid and happy contentedness. She dropped the toy from her mouth and used her words to ask to stop.

“I didn’t think the fuzz would get in my mouth.”

“That’s okay angel, we can do something else.”

“Could I stay on my knees?”

I sat on the edge of the bed. I took her collar from her mouth. Her breath went heavy as I put it on her. I didn’t think of any of this as sex until weeks after it happened. I couldn’t have allowed myself to. I think the repression and denial, mine and her’s, was part and parcel of the enjoyment. I fingered the outside of Soph’s throat under her collar. I took care not to touch the hard part that I knew made her self-conscious. Her breath hitched. I noticed she had an erection and I smirked. Everything took place in slow motion, she let out sharp exhales and half inhalations. I got hard too. We weren’t having sex, and so I was safe, and our relationship was built on love over lust. And it could be fun to dance on the line, if I knew we’d stay safe. I wanted to touch her teeth. I told her about it. I pushed her down, her cheek rubbing against the inside of my thigh. I knew she was mine.

“Good boy. Good dog.”

I brought Sophie back onto the bed. She barked and laid her head on my chest again. I hope she could hear me breathe. We fell asleep like that, twin animals.

“If we do that kind of stuff tonight can we go home early? I might need you to hold me and tell me it was okay to treat you like a dog. I might need that even if we don’t do it again tonight.”

Sophie cooked dinner. It was a Sichuan pork dish. Her dad taught Chinese history at a different private liberal arts school than the one she went to. I don’t know if she got into cooking Sichuan food from him, but it’s my best guess. Sophie pronounced tofu as “dofu” which she says is closer to the Chinese pronunciation. It’s close enough to the English one that it mostly makes her sound silly to me. Her new place had a range hood, which was a big upgrade. Sophie’s apartment with Ash had windows that opened so little you couldn’t fit a fan in for exhaust. Their whole place had reeked of old grease. There were very few vegetables and only a little rice in Sophie’s dish. I did my best to eat it, but it was too rich for me. I have the palate of a child, it is one of my worst attributes. Sophie comforted me about it, which made it feel worse, and then bought me a few slices of pizza. I felt rude and embarrassed.

“I’m a picky eater too. I’m just used to Chinese food.”

The function started at nine. Sophie was stressing about getting there late. We left around the time it was meant to start. I wore heels for the first time out, with a short skirt and an itty bitty top. My beat was cute. Sophie thought I was so hot, which I needed. She said my shoes were lickable. I blushed. She showed me how to hit whippets, and then got dressed. A pair of shorts covered her jockstrap. For the first time ever, she wore mascara, and she did her eyeliner like normal, and she wore an Adidas sports bra. She put her collar and muzzle in her new purse. It was a forty-five minute bus ride. My hand sat on hers, and then moved onto her thigh, and then inwards. She rested her head on my neck.

Sophie gave me her card to buy drinks with. Nobody was on the dance floor upstairs, so we went down to the basement. We found out most of the girls were smoking, a few guys were on the floor downstairs, and most of the men were in the backroom. We danced together. I held her leash tight and kept her close to me. Cleaner Tapes was selling poppers upstairs. I bought two bottles and thought about buying more. Sophie said I’d be back in town again, and told me to save some money. She bought a bottle too. She must’ve had ten bottles in the fridge by then from her purchases and my

discards. When we went to the smoking section we saw one of Sophie's friends from undergrad. Everybody talked to us both like normal. I was really overwhelmed and confused by it.

When I used to go to the Leather Stallion, it seemed everyone got the whole puppy thing. I had gone when I was young, and figured I wasn't special. This might not be true, I probably had etiquette explained to me, but I was young and thought it was a normal growing up experience. Everyone just talked to Sophie like she was a regular person. Trans girls online say they're fucking puppygirls like crazy, but it felt awful different at the real life transfem play party. Sophie hates to be called a puppygirl. She's not a person at all when she's a dog, she'd say. She's only a puppy.

From what I got, as an outsider and frequent attendant of pup events when I was in my teens, you don't really talk to a pup, unless it's on its own. I'm going to use male language here and say pup more than puppy because this is the language of the world I was in. You talk to an owner or handler before you address the dog. You don't say make conversation with the pup. You can scratch behind its ears and maybe elsewhere, and you might be able to tell the pup he's a good boy, or a good dog, but that's something the pup and the owner have talked about before going out. And this was also the situation Sophie

and I had talked about, a month's worth of discussion and preparation and stating boundaries. And I didn't think for a second I would need to explain it to anyone.

After we stopped talking every day, Sophie said I should've told people to stop talking to her without talking to me first. She didn't tell me this at the function. She sent me mixed messages and she kept her collar on and let me hold her leash. But she didn't want me to touch her ears or stand too near. When I would get close, she'd start talking to someone else. I couldn't get out of handler space without leaving the situation, and Sophie wanted to stay late.

She had got all dressed down and her ass was out. I don't think jockstraps look particularly good on anyone. They cover the curves of your ass, I think. Sophie was of the exact opposite opinion. She went down to the back room, and was gone for half an hour. We had talked about it, I figured she might fuck someone. I danced, I made out with a girl. I put my knee between the girl's thighs and pushed her against the wall for a while. After the song ended she told me she had fun but was going to go back to the floor. I lost track of Sophie.

Around three am I told Soph that we ought to close out. I was coming close to being awake for twenty four hours, having

got very little rest beforehand. Soph went back into the backroom without telling me, and was down there nearly an hour. I was stuck waiting for the bar to close down. Transit was mostly cut by the time she got out. We took a bus for a while, and then walked for what felt like ages. By the time she was sleeping next to me it was 6 AM.

I didn't get much rest that night. Sophie wanted to be up early to prepare for her party. I was experiencing pretty profound drop. We had talked about leaving around one or two in the morning and going to a diner. I was going to lay my head on her shoulder and hold her hands tight. We were going to buy ice cream at a convenience store. I was going to eat a little ice cream while watching Star Trek: The Next Generation with her, and then Soph would touch my hair and tell me I did good. She'd finish the episode with me, and then we would fall asleep. We had talked about how I might need a treat the morning after too.

Sophie wanted to rush out of the house and said I could hold her later. I offered to help her move because I had a car. She said she'd hire a U-Haul, and that her ex was going to drive it for her that upcoming Friday. Sophie never got her license. We drove to get beer, and then cheap breakfast. I played a lot of jungle on the way there, she said it was cute. It was tracks

with a lot of stabs in them. To me jungle is practically just stabs and pads and breaks and bass, and vocals don't hurt to add. Breakfast was rushed but decent diner fare. We went dutch on the bill.

The party was scheduled to start at three and run till ten, so Sophie wanted to be there at two. I asked Soph if she could be there at two thirty. She was nervous and then got a little grumpy, but she obliged me in the end. I felt awful and mean for treating her like a dog, and because I hadn't been comforted after or during. It sounded like it was all Sophie wanted when she had talked to me before I visited. She liked being my puppy. It didn't feel like she was hearing what I was saying to her then, what I had told her before.

"I don't want to be moody for your birthday. Please can't we try something. I need to know you still love me. I need you to know I love you and that's why I did it."

We were getting dressed. I couldn't bear to be apart from her. She was topless. I got on top of her.

"Can I kiss your body? I don't want to make out with you. I need to do something. I think it'll soothe me."

"Sure."

I kissed her left shoulder over and over, and then her collarbone. My chin must've touched her breasts. I was on the verge of tears.

"I love you so much. I can't ruin your birthday. I really need comfort. Last night was so much and so overwhelming."

Sophie pushed me off.

"We don't have any more time. Will won't see me if we don't go right now."

Will was one of her straight guy friends. Sophie had known him since she was a kid and he had introduced her to a lot of the people who knew when she first moved to Chicago. Sophie was starting to get into the music scene when I met her, but before that had spent a lot of time around improv "comedians". I tried to be on my best behavior around her friends. I hoped she would show me tenderness later.

Sophie wore a threadbare oversized white Crystal Castles t-shirt. She wore her hair in two long braids. We got there later than she'd hoped because I took too long to parallel park. Will was still there. He was going to be late to work but had stayed to see the birthday girl. Sophie glared at me. He talked about how he had had really awful and boring straight sex with a woman he wasn't particularly attracted to the night before. He said it "straight sex" like he was gay. Sophie and

Ash insisted he was, but being in a fake situation with a woman, even a hookup, I think is a little disrespectful as an adult in Chicago in 2025. And there'd be no reason to humiliate her after the fact to prove your heterosexuality if you say it in a way that casts down on your heterosexuality. I mostly think I really and sincerely hate almost all men by default, or at least give them very little grace.

Sophie's other straight friend was there, the one who was mean to her. I wish I liked the men she loved. I worry it makes me sound jealous. He was homelier than I expected, and unfunny, and boring, and rude. He asked me some basic questions about philosophy, and asked if I have "slave morality". Later he asked if I thought Jews were necessarily immoral before the introduction of Zarathustra's Gathas to the Judeans.

It was my best friend's 24th birthday party, her actual birthday was in two days, and I didn't want to start a scene. This dude was evil, but it was his house. Most people didn't come for another hour or two. There was nothing to do in the waiting period besides drink. It felt like my birthday party again, in that there was a larger group of people, and then this distinct group of transsexual women who talked to mostly one another, including the party's host. This kind of thing happens more in

groups than as individuals I think. I rarely get harassed in public alone but I'll get called a faggot by nearby drivers when I'm walking with another woman. I think I'm safer at the club with one cis friend than with two trans girls by me.

I want to sit close to Sophie, to hold her hand, but she moves away from me when I try. She stayed a few feet away from me a lot of the time. I was confused and dejected and felt left out of a lot of the conversations, as an outsider to the city and the group. It was endearing to hear Sophie talk about Fourier transformations and additive synthesis with people who actually understood what she meant. She smiled a lot and I took a ton of good pictures of her. Sophie smoked plenty of superslims that day. She gets really self-conscious about her hands too. She freaks specifically how small they are, even though ours are almost the same size. We put them up to one another my first time in Chicago. Will says she has the hands of a decrepit old woman.

I felt really droopy and self-conscious myself. I knew I needed to be touching her more than a normal friend might, and I wasn't sure what she had told anyone else. Sophie had invited Ash, even though I knew Ash wouldn't come. More than anything it felt like Sophie was embarrassed of me. She would

admit this much later. It hurt more to hear than to have just known it as a feeling.

The group hit whippets and Soph sat near me. It was the twilight of the party and Sophie had decided to be warm and sweet again. Delilah, who I knew from parties I used to go to, bought Sophie a copy of *The Trans Girl Suicide Museum*. Nobody else bought her a gift, and there was no cake. Sophie said her male friends treat her like one of the boys. I remember getting treated that way, when everyone around me knew I was trans before I did. They treated me like a sissy faggot.

Will came back right as the party was wrapping up. Sophie, Will, and I each had another balloon or two. We walked around and sniffed poppers and the two of them smoked a ciggie each. Will had to go back home, and so did we. Sophie asked about going to a bar, but I had was tired from getting drunk all day. The two of us sobered up a little on a walk back to the car.

I played a little *Katamari Damacy* in Sophie's bedroom. She had a controller wired up to her Macbook. She cooked for me again, and asked if I wanted to go out dancing.

“I really need a break. Can we stay in? We can play puppy again if we’re really gentle. I was kind of dropping all today.”

We stayed in and it was almost nice. I needed more kindness from her than she could give me that night. Sophie had warned me before that she talked in her sleep.

“All my past partners took a while to get used to it. They woke up a lot.”

I didn’t hear a peep, or I slept heavily enough that I didn’t notice. I like to think Sophie was fully relaxed with my legs between hers.

It was Phoebe’s actual birthday, my last full day with Sophie. We went to a millennial owned horror 80s/90s themed cafe by her new place. The coffee was just okay. Sophie said the espresso and soda she had bought me when she lived with Ash was the best in the city. We bought eggs at a tiny grocer’s on the walk back. She cooked us eggs for breakfast. It felt almost domestic.

Sophie took me on the train, just to show me around the city and mostly to get out of the house. It’s cute to let her do something like this, even though almost all my attention is on

her. Soph laid her head on my chest, and I held her hand. I'm touching her hair, and my hand's on her thigh. She comments on how high my hand goes up her leg, but she's not discouraging me. This trip has a lot less talking than when I've seen her before. I've been touch starved and it's beautiful to interface just like this. Andrea Dworkin says this touch-based nonverbal sort of relationship is inherently erotic.

"What are we?"

"What do you mean?"

"We hold hands and you put your hand on my thigh, and I'm your puppy. Are we still friends?"

"Yeah, um. I think you're my best friend right now."

"Don't you think we're kind of weird friends?"

"We can be weird friends." I'm smiling, "I really like what we have."

"I don't know. I wish we had a label."

"Like what? We aren't dating. We might be weird friends but you're really my closest friend. I don't want anything to change between us."

We changed trains. Sophie was taking me to her favorite restaurant in the city, a Sichuan spot in Chinatown. She looked really beautiful there. She has bright brown eyes, and her injections are really working, and I take a few pictures of

her. She asks me to spend less time on my phone, less because I'm taking pictures of her, and more because I'm texting Phoebe.

"I know it's their birthday, but this is my dinner. Can you be here with me?"

She loved the pork fat in her dish. My Chongqing chicken could have had more peppercorn. It was still really nice. I'm used to struggling to finish a plate due to the spice. This has less flavor but it's a pleasure, not a trial, to clean the plate. Sophie was right to tell me to be off my phone. It was nice and cute to eat with her. It felt almost like a date.

Pride was happening that day. By the amount of people we took on the train back, the parade must have been starting or ending. Everyone else is dressed all in rainbow and glitter. Sophie had bought me dinner, and we were two trans girls holding hands, and her muzzle is still hooked onto her purse. We looked like the most regular people on the train, just dressed in black.

Halfway before home, I have to ask.

"Do you want something sweet?"

I told Sophie she had to let me buy her a cake or at least get ice cream with me. We hadn't talked about cake before but she had promised to let me eat ice cream as aftercare after Jackhammer, and hadn't followed through. But mostly it was her birthday, and she deserved kindness, and I love her. I got chocolate, and too much of it. She got two flavors, which I never knew before, that the two scoops could be two different things. It was cute and simple, and I insisted I pay, and she let me.

We walked just around to nowhere, and then started walking home after we'd finished our cones. She asked me a lot of questions about a guy from her school I dated in undergrad, or more accurately, a guy I had sex with for a month or two. She got righteously mad about him for being transmisogynistic, which he was, but I mostly talked about how he had been abusive to his last ex, who was a trans girl too. Sophie was sweet. It felt like she was comparing her behavior favorably to him, which was unnecessary. I wasn't hurt about anything that happened in a situationship from before I was 21. We held hands on the sidewalk as we headed back.

Will came over, and I got confused again. Sophie laid in bed with us both, and brushed my hand away when I put it near her. We watched HBO's *Girls*, because she went to the same college as the titular girl, and they thought it was funny. I get

confused, or I know this type of woman and they mostly annoy me, so maybe the jokes landed exactly wrong. Will said he liked the half-underground basement apartment for Sophie, and that it fit her, because she is ugly and creepy, like a troll. Will had to go to a party, he says, but maybe we will see him later.

“Can you please not invite him out with us tonight angel?”

“He is one of my oldest friends. I’m going to invite him.”

Soph cooked dinner again. Her voice changed back. She talked normally with Will, and anytime we had been talking to someone else. At home and on the bus, she had a softer tone. The pitch was a little higher and her resonance shifted. It felt like she had voice trained a little and only let me hear it. It was really cute and vulnerable to hear, and it endeared me to her. We napped after dinner, I think we both needed the rest. Sophie had talked before about showing me some sound design stuff in Ableton, but I didn’t have the mindset to learn anything serious that weekend. We played dog a little. I scratched her tummy with my foot.

“Do you realize you’re basically stepping on me?”

“Oh. I guess that’s true. We should stop doing this—could you put something on your laptop and we can just watch it in bed instead?”

Sophie was sure she had saved some episodes of Buffy and My Little Pony somewhere. I called Phoebe as Soph looked through her hard drive, and I apologized profusely that I couldn't talk more, and I would've said more but Phoebe is calling my name right now. Sophie showed me the girl she was seeing. They didn't have a label but she was sleeping over semi-regularly by then. She was a 32 year old transfem butch who worked at a bar and made hacky video art. I talked about how I worried I had fucked things up irrevocably with Phoebe.

"I did try to break up with them, y'know. Now they're so anxious and it makes sense and it's their birthday and I can't even legally be in the same country. I just want everything to be okay. I wish I wasn't so stupid."

"They know you love them. It's really plain to see. You really did fuck up this time. But you two have something special. Phoebe is going to forgive you."

Sophie and I went out to Rainbo. We drank a lot, we smoked a lot, and when we went out to smoke, or for her to smoke and me to watch, we'd hit poppers. Sophie gave me money for our second round, I ordered. We sat at the bar, she was wearing her collar. I touched her hair, and then her collar, and then touched her throat, and she stopped being able to talk. I stopped when the bartender gave us our drinks.

“You are such a bitch, it’s really cute.”

“You’re such a faggot, you love me when I’m a bitch.”

It felt really natural and easy, and Sophie said she really liked it besides. We finished our drinks in two or three speedy gulps, and then went back out so I could hold and she could smoke a skinny cig.

I wanted to pin her against the wall and hit her, and push my knee into her cunt. Or, maybe it was more complicated, and I wanted this because it was a type of intimacy I was only used to having with Phoebe, and that’s what I’d do with Phoebe. I think though, that Sophie looked really small and was obviously desperate to be hurt, and would look really cute if my knee was the only thing holding her up and my fist was pushing into her stomach. I was really drunk at this point, and sniffing poppers probably helped me achieve this mental state. Getting into this mindset is half of why I sniff them anyways.

“Did you know that girl at Jackhammer didn’t even grab my butt?”

“Woah, really?”

“Yeah, she just put her hands on my waist. It was nice but. Y’know. Different.”

“I guess.”

“You could if you wanted...”

“Huh?”

“You can put your hands right here.” “Mhm, like that, and then you can move your hands um.

Yeah, and you can grab me as much as you want right now okay?”

“You feel nice.”

“I know. I wanted someone to tell me. You’re doing real good for me... Could I touch you too?”

“Sure.”

“I really thought you’d be so skinny. It’s really soft.”

“Girls fuck me for a reason.”

“I never said you were ugly. You’re far from it dear.”

It was only like that for maybe thirty seconds. I had to piss, we went back in. There’s only one bathroom there, we stood close in line, the sides of our hips basically touching.

When we came out, the bar was full, so we sat in a booth. I didn’t say anything for a while. My heart does this thing around trans women I love. It swells up with pride and sadness, and I’m so proud of how beautiful and strong they are, and I get

sad they have to be so strong. I want to take care of her more than anything. I want to do more for her than I ever could.

“You still don’t think we need a label for what we’ve got?”

“Well. I like being your friend. I don’t want to fuck you, and I don’t want to date you. So mostly I think you’re my friend. We’re close and I love you like crazy, but I don’t know if I’m anxious to put a word on it. I kind of need to just have a friendship even if it’s crazy. I can’t handle what it means about me if I can’t just have a friend.”

“So you don’t want to fuck me at all?”

“Girl... No. I think you’re really cute, but I’m not attracted to you that way. Honestly and more importantly, I think it’d ruin our relationship, and I need to keep having just this.”

“How do I change so that you’d fuck me? What do I have to do to become fuckable?”

“Angel.”

It took me a second.

“That’s really sad. It hurts that you asked me that. I love you so much.”

“Would you want to fuck me if I had a fatter ass?”

I smiled. “Um. It would help.”

I didn't want to laugh, it was probably really rude. But I'm not so complicated, it would probably help. It really shocked me what was happening.

"But I don't... I don't want to have sex with you, and I don't want to want to have sex with you, and I really needed this not to happen again." It felt a million times worse than the last time she had said something similar.

"Can we have this conversation later? When we're sober? You might have to go into work late or get off early or something. But I don't want this with beer in my system."

"Whatever."

You can buy coffee at Rainbo too. It's only a dollar. I got two cups, and had two more beers, and it felt like I was having an alcoholic's breakfast at two in the morning. I was trying not to be so cold to Sophie.

I played pinball for a while, and she watched, and I just talked about the table, how there's mechanics I haven't figured out how to unlock, or I haven't had a game that lasts long enough to activate them. I wasn't trying to have a deep or even compelling conversation. I was trying to avoid talking about anything real until we were both sober.

“Pinball is a game all about sexual tension.” Her words. I genuinely don’t believe anybody has ever been more wrong. It was almost cute to hear her say it, even though it made me sad. We got home around 3 AM.

In bed, I asked Soph to take the next day off, to use sick time or just call in. She said she wouldn’t, we could talk the next evening after she got off work. She was going to a concert that night with a guy she had fucked in the back room on Friday. Sophie wanted to be fucked by him, so maybe she and I could just have a quick dinner. We could resolve everything in forty-five minutes before she went out to meet with her boy. All I would have to do was busy myself for eight to ten hours in an unfamiliar city with no house key and a thinning wallet.

It was five thirty by the time we woke up, and Sophie’s commute was about an hour. She worked at seven. I pleaded with Sophie to take the day off, that I was too tired and didn’t have long enough to talk with her. I don’t want this to end here, and it might, and I’m scared, and I love you, and I miss you now and you haven’t left yet. Sophie refused me again. You can see me after, she said. Maybe get breakfast with someone else, and then go to a museum or something.

I had texted Ash about it the day before, getting breakfast with her before she went to work. I went back to bed for an hour, and then texted Ash saying I'd let them know if breakfast worked, but that I might've lost my appetite. I slept until about ten.

“Please come home, I'm too anxious to eat Sophie.”

“I'm working. I'll be home around four.”

“I think I'm going to drive if you won't leave. I don't want to have to pick up the cat too late from Phoebe's folks place. I'm sorry I have to miss your actual birthday.”

About half an hour out of the city, I started texting her.

10:30

“I miss you so much. It hurts to have to go home, I wish we could’ve resolved this in person angel.”

“It feels so crazy for you to say that we’re just friends.”

“I don’t want our relationship to be anything else really. I liked playing with you but I can’t have a relationship centered around that.”

“It’s not just play. We do other stuff like friends don’t do. We slept in the same bed every night, and you kissed my shoulders, and you looked really deep in my eyes a bunch.”

“Angel, I love you. I think that was all part of doing puppy stuff with you, that I needed more intimacy from you. We can stop, if it makes you uncomfortable, if you feel like I’m leading you on.”

“Yeah what I wanted all along was for you to treat me like I’m just fucking disposable.”

“Girl. I love you. You have to know that I love you. I just want you to be happy and feel okay with me.”

“I love you too. I’m sorry.” “Sometimes it feels like you’re cheating on Phoebe with me.”

11:30

“Sorry for being so crazygirl. I’m less frustrated than before. I’m not trying to be your girlfriend, I think you do actually know what I need here. I’m just tired of feeling like a side piece.”

1:00

“I just called Phoebe for like two hours. Sorry for not responding earlier. I wish I could’ve stayed longer.”

“Did you talk to Phoebe about what I said last night?”

“It was a long conversation. But yeah, that was part of it angel.”

“I assumed it wasn’t all about me.”

“Do you really feel like a side piece?”

“Sometimes, yeah.”

“Why?”

“I know I mean a lot to you as a friend and it’s unrelated to kink but...” “I’m at work right now. Can we put a pin in this? Maybe call later?”

“Okay. You’re off work in two hours, home in three?”

“Three and a bit. Then I’m seeing that guy from Jackhammer.

He wants to fist me but he’s taking me to a skramz show first.”

3:00

“I like everything we do together. I just wish you would take ownership of what we are but I don’t even know what that is. You treat me like more than a friend or at least different. I love

you a lot and know that everything will be fine no matter what. I just can't help but feel fucked with sometimes."

"I hate that you feel fucked with. I try to be really intentional with you."

"I had a great time this weekend but I do feel fucked with. It's on you to make it make sense."

"That's fair. I just don't know exactly how to clear stuff up with you."

"I don't think I have feelings that you don't share. I don't want to do anything we don't already do, but I do want to kiss you. I know you've kissed other friends. I feel so confused and like you never acknowledge that the way you act can be confusing."

"I think if I kissed you it might become sex. I wish I could explain that in more depth it's just a feeling. I'm sorry. I must act crazy."

"You act kind of crazy, yeah. You've already kissed me in more intimate places than my lips."

"That was totally different."

"How did it feel different to you?"

"I was dropping really hard. We talked a lot about how you would take care of me after Jackhammer, and then you didn't. I know it was intense, but I came close to crying, and I was so overwhelmed and hurt, and I couldn't let myself cry at your party."

"I would literally love this whole situation if it wasn't so weird and confusing. I feel used."

“Every part of our relationship makes you feel used?”

“No, not at all. Specifically when you kissed me, and when I grabbed you, and the way you looked at me. And some moments when it felt like the right thing would’ve been to kiss you. I had a really beautiful weekend with you.”

5:00

“I can not touch you next time, Is that the wrong conclusion?” “I just woke up. I’m home now by the way.”

“I liked it. I guess it made me want you to keep touching me in a way that felt good in the moment and now feels really bad.”

“I basically never want to cultivate anything that makes you feel bad. I miss you so much. I hate that stuff is complicated ever, even though that’s really infantile.”

“It is really infantile of you. I wish we had the type of relationship where we could keep doing what we’re doing without making me feel used and sad. Is that fair?”

“That’s fair, yeah. I love you. Can we call about this later too? I wish we could’ve talked in person but I don’t want this to be just over text.”

11:15

“I’m at the skramz show right now, I’ll be free later if you’re still up, if you want to call. Tomorrow I’m off, we could call whenever works for you tomorrow.”

12:40

“He’s a drag king. The show was kind of whatever, we went to the bar afterwards. He bought me a bottle of soju and he bought me a pint of Old Style for a dollar. The sex was great, but he made me bleed.”

“He made you bleed!? Are you okay?”

“Yeah he just fingered me aggressively and he has untrimmed nails. I promise I’m fine.”

“Girl. I love you so much. You deserve better than untrimmed nails from a dude.”

“I miss you a bunch. I could call now if you wanted.”

We called, it was just after one.

“I’m just some stupid bitch you play video games with, and then you get to do kink with me and we stop when you want to stop, and nothing means anything to you.”

“Sophie, that’s really not how I feel about things. I really love you and I do my best to show that I love you as much as I can. It breaks my heart to hear you talk like this. I don’t think I’ve loved a friend more than I love you.”

“I’m just your friend. I’m your fucking buddy. All you want to do with me is hang out and drink beers with me. It makes me want to find a fucking bridge and jump off of it. I’m just fucking nothing to you.”

“Angel...”

“I want to know that you really love me.”

“I do love you.”

“You treat me like I don’t matter. You’ve never shown me you cared about me once. I’m just your silly stupid side piece and you’ve never loved me.”

“Do you really feel that way?”

“You constantly deprioritize me. I’ll always be in second place.”

“I don’t know if I can talk right now Soph. You’re really hurting me. You don’t think I’ve ever shown that I love you?”

“It’s how I feel.”

“I have to go to bed right now. I can’t. I can’t do this right now. I’m so so sorry. My heart hurts.”

“Goodnight.”

“I hope you remember soon how much I love you. You really hurt me tonight Sophie.”

I fell asleep cold, and scared that I had been too harsh to her.

I worked the next day. Sophie texted me in the morning.

“Why did you say you would end up having sex with me if we kissed. I’ll be good. I really promise.”

“I can’t process any of this right now. Please don’t talk to me right now.”

“Are you mad at me? I would understand if you were mad.”

“I don’t get mad at people I love.”

“Now would be the time to get mad at me.”

“I love you. Patience and forgiveness are part of what love is.”

We called after I got off work. Sophie said she had had a few drinks, and a joint, and didn’t know what she was doing. She said it was the stupidest thing she’d ever done, and she sat in silence with her problems like she was a teenager again. She’d make it up to me somehow.

“You’re still my favorite person.”

## VII

Time stopped. I stopped eating or sleeping, or enjoying anything. I stopped listening to music almost entirely. I would find one album I might loop for a few days, and then give it up. Mostly I listened to audiobooks really fast. I needed to try to completely understand someone else's life, as far from my own as possible, like I didn't have a body or mind at all. After the call everything changed. I almost instantly forgot all the ways Sophie had ever shown that she loved me, and slowly I forgot how and why I loved her.

I was twenty-six and it felt like I had become sixteen again. Love became big and confusing and alienating, and I felt like I could never have it or get it or hold on to it, even with Phoebe. I started having nightmares about sex again, like I did when I was younger.

Casey Plett writes about it pretty well in *A Dream of a Woman*. You're naked and you don't really want to do it, or you don't want to do it how your partner does. It's scary and it's sad and it's overwhelming, and once it happens enough, you stop objecting and you figure out some way to tune out the actual experience of having sex. You're inside them and you bifurcate. It's something like pleasure but worse, and your body is in

control more than you, and if you were normal maybe you could like what your body is doing and what's happening to it. You just try to be out of your body as much as you can. I used to be really good at dissociating during sex, I don't know if I was really there any time I had sex before I started dating Phoebe.

In these dreams, or maybe I can claim nightmare because they caused me distress, but Sophie didn't even do anything to me so I don't want to say she gave me nightmares. I'm fucking Sophie, and she is my dog, and I'm pulling her collar, or her leash, and my pussy is hard like a dick, and I'm fucking her hole. Sophie always told me she hated being strapped. An almost animal instinct pushes me further and further into her, and all I want to do is stop, but I can't. I am in her and she is enjoying herself and all I can think is that if I fuck her she will keep loving me. If I fuck her enough she will love me again for real. I can allow myself to be used however she needs me if it means she will be nice to me again. Maybe I can become some perfect abstract and uncaring dominant woman, and I can hit her how she needs, and she won't need to hold me after. Thinking these things, about how useless I am outside of my cock, is better than thinking of being inside her. I cum in her hole, or on her, and I wake up confused and desperate, and alone.

I get scared and obsessive and almost possessive, I am emotionally a teenager. I know Sophie wants me to split with Phoebe and move in with her. I am still talking to Sophie almost every day. I get so worried that everyone only wants me because they assume, and are right, that I still have a dick, and that it technically has the capacity to get hard.

I need the brown haired boy I love to hold me tight and look deep into my eyes. He is wearing boxer briefs and I am wearing a white camisole and no panties. He tells me he will never fuck me. When I get a pussy he will love me the same, and he will never fuck me. It's a type of safety I don't think I'll get.

I start to jack off to Soph. It's self harm. I can think about dissociating and fucking her, and my pleasure from touching myself is totally secondary. It can take me so long to be comfortable with the prospect of being desired. When we text, I tell Sophie she hurt me by transforming our relationship into one where love could only be proved through fucking. I was devoted to her. I thought the way to show it was explicitly marking sex as off-limits. I couldn't have thought we were having sex in the moment. We were just friends with an unusual dynamic.

It was sex, what we had, and it became impossible to think of what had happened as anything else, even without genital contact. I think about how our relationship did become all about sex after all, and I should have never touched her like an animal. I should have told Ash to stay late at the bar in March.

I talked to Soph because I needed nothing to have happened. She would say I don't want to make you cry. I'd be crying when texting her "Don't worry about it". And later, I would confess this because I hate to lie to her. This repeated more times than I could count before she stopped reaching out to me in the daytime. It was still good morning's and good night's. Sophie told me about her girlfriend, and the ambient set she was working on that was about me. Sophie was seeing a bunch of new girls. She went to a party and felt objectified, and like she was getting propositioned and not hit on. She apologized to me after.

"I think you were right about how girls treat girls sometimes. I'm really sorry."

She was fucking a lot. She went to parties with her new girlfriend and did lots of coke and ket. She texted the night she sniffed cocaine and then hit poppers right after. I called her

immediately and told her to never do it again at least because I love and care about her. I could talk to her for minutes or hours every day, and if I tried I could forget anything happened. She told me she wasn't anyone else's puppy, and was having regular sex, and that an older butch thought she was snuffbait. She could get kidnapped by anyone. She wanted to stay my dog.

I was reading bell hooks and Audre Lorde, and then Viviane Namaste. It was the Passion According to GH and then every trans book I had heard of and hadn't read yet. I was reading comics too, and more stuff than I could list. I was reading ten or more books every month for a stretch there. It can feel like a disease to read.

Sophie and I sent music back and forth less, I listened to Forth Wanders and Bladee mostly. One is yearning and feels made for lesbians and the other more than anything reminds me of her. Sophie listened to Imogen Heap. I wanted to get drunk every night, like I knew she did. I couldn't afford the hangovers, or afford to drink as much as I wanted, even without eating. I was losing weight. She always told me she wanted to cook for me, and that my not eating scared her.

I drank like I was twenty. I drank a lot when I was sixteen too, but it was different then. Sixteen was getting tipsy as many nights as I could sneak out some of the beer my parents kept stocked in the fridge. Twenty was getting properly drunk.

I never planned for it, but it feels like a formula now. I wouldn't eat all day because I was depressed and I didn't know how to cook. I mostly drank Monster Energy and broke the routine with Redbull. Variety is the spice of life. I would buy a six pack, or two of those big twenty-four ounce beers that sell for less than two dollars each. I got really drunk once or twice a week, and I started sniffing poppers when I was tipsy. They lived in the part of the fridge made for butter and I hit them first when they were still cold.

I used to think I am my most emotionally vulnerable like this, or maybe I really am. I wanted to be high on poppers all the time. I was probably never sober around my college boyfriend for more than an hour or two. Since starting estrogen I wish substances could bring me out of my body like they used to. Maybe I like being in my body too much now.

## VIII

I'm twenty-six now, drunk off a six pack of Old Style. It's Soph's beer of choice. I get real dumb and watch Youtube videos I thought were sincere and intense when I was nineteen and intoxicated in the exact same way as I am now. I cry for no reason, and then I cry because I deserve it. I cry because I'm stuck in this small town, and I'll never pass for cis, and this will keep my life awful. I want to reach back out to Sophie, who I should be comforting. Phoebe would be so mad if they knew how I feel right now. I have to punish myself in this way and carry it with me. I have to punish myself because I don't know why people are so mean to transsexual women, or maybe it's just me, and if I let myself be comfortable ever it is so much worse when reality strikes back. If I had the energy to think about how I am treated, how I have to let myself be treated to get through the day, and how she treated me, I will cry so much it fills up the room. It feels like the first part of the Vagina Monologues. She is kissing a boy in a car, or maybe just holding hands with him. She gets wet, and he can see her wetness. He says she is gross, and yells at her, and leaves. This happens now almost every night in her dreams. He leaves, and the car is locked. It isn't wetness, it's something foul and murky and different. It pours out of her. It fills the car and then

she can't breathe anymore, and she knows everyone can see her about to die and ugly through it all, and they are laughing at her.

Sophie, I want you to be right. I want us to have dated and then broken up as girlfriends, not some unlabelled thing. I was a bad girlfriend to you. I need it to be my fault, so I can fix something. If it is something wrong you did to me then there is nothing to fix and the only thing I can do is hurt until I run out of hurt. I read about astrology, because things are easier with Phoebe than with you even though you were both practically born on the same day. Even born four years apart and in different parts of the country, it feels like your stars should be close. I want to live without consequences. I tell you I would have been an awful girlfriend but I was not your girlfriend, I was your friend, and I loved being your friend, and I think I did pretty good at it too for a while. I want you to be justified though, I want your possessiveness and jealousy to make sense. I want it all to be my fault. You say I should look into Tarot. You offer me a reading. You say there is more wisdom in the cards than in the stars. I don't believe in any magic. I thought it would be cathartic to treat my stupid breakup with a girl like a cartoon lesbian breakup.

It is fortunate for me that you never looked at the stars or the moon, and that you only saw them when I bugged you to go outside and look. It was nice then, to share something over the distance. I don't think your new girl is looking at stars with you. I get scared when my five day cycle rotates and I'm injecting on Sundays just like you, and you tell me you inject on Saturdays now. We don't share anything anymore. I exhale, and I cry too.

This all feels like stupid and toxic yuri. I reread Kathy Acker and feel like we are R and V in *Memoriam to Identity*. I can't be with you because I can't ruin my life to be with you, because we would not heal together, and so I can't love you. I love that you want to ruin your life for me, and I did my best to ruin mine too. It will not be a situation where we hate each other and fuck crazy. I will not have anybody else in my life, or a job, and I will not fuck you very often, and I will be the scared dog and you will have to mother me. I know I love you because you hurt me and I still am afraid to be without you. If I keep hurting myself and lash out enough you'll stop loving me and it will be easier. If I keep hurting, I'll forget I loved you and only remember the pain. It's twisted and stupid and it's just how I felt in high school. I want us to punish each other instead of ourselves. When the world is too much and you are overwhelmed and anxious I want you to stop hitting your head

against the wall, and I want you to do the same to me until I am so dumb I can only drool. I will be so good and stupid and pliant for you when you are done, and you can do it as much as you want.

It scares me so much to mean anything to anyone. I can't be your girl because then I will matter to you. I want to be your mother. I want to dote on you and be servile. I want you to be rude and callous and stupid, you could treat me like an ungrateful kid and forget that I'm a real person too, and I want you to forget, and be tended to. And maybe I won't get to be a mom any other way.

Won't you tell me how stupid and selfish I am, and how I was a frigid bitch who teased you for months? I don't want to have to think about it anymore. I could find relief in doting on you. Won't you tell me all my worries about my character are right? You can use my cock, and I can have one for you, and you can pretend to be stupid with me even as you control me. I can lose sensation when we fuck and know that you feel safe with me in you, and be sated in this way.

It is so natural to be anxious without you, in the same way it was so natural to be calm with you. Girls know me and lust after me, and I get scared and sad and cold and confused.

It is a pattern and I don't know what part is my fault but I must be some type of coquettish cocktease without knowing how. This is so new, I've never needed the girl to touch me again after I run away.

You were so nice to me when you weren't in a man's house. You were sweet when there wasn't a man in your apartment. It was alcohol too, and malice that made you hurt me, and it was a man inside you too. Would you have been gentle with me if I was a man? You told me when you were drunk with me every time at Rainbo, how you had wanted me when I was a boy, how I was handsome and desirable. You love the hair on my face and you compliment the hair on my chest. It stays the thinnest stubble I can get, and laser is helping. Everyone else gets the message, and stays hush about the parts of me I want gone. You saw me naked often when I was a young slut, when there was testosterone creeping unfettered in my body. We can have the easy boygirl sex you want. You are so jealous that I played video games and boys played with my mouth, and we can make this happen between us. You are so forgiving of the men who treat you like dirt. If I stop injecting estrogen and let my body become someone else's, the way Big Fat Christian God made me, maybe you will forgive me. If my beard grows long and sensation becomes

distant, when I wake up will I be myself again? Am I stuck as this awful insecure thing I've turned into?

Do you know that I am right? That I am the older woman who knows what is best for you, and that you could not handle having sex with me, and I trusted you to tell me how you really felt before you let lust fester into resentment.

## IX

A month passed alone. Phoebe came back, they left the residency early because of the emotional turmoil I had caused. I talk to Sophie less, or I try. I know Phoebe needs plenty of comfort. I know that asking Phoebe to help me diminishes their feelings, which are my fault. I talk to Sophie when I am at work, maybe for an hour or two, so I am not stealing time away from Phoebe. I try to cry at work on my lunch breaks, because everything is my mess and I do not want Phoebe to clean me up. I stop talking to Soph for a day or two, and then have to talk with her again. I can't handle her being definitively in or out of my life. I know this makes everything worse.

I call Sophie. We talk about our relationships, and her ambient set. She sends me a demo and I should not listen. We should talk less, I say. She agrees. We will stop texting, but can still message online, and will only call weekly. Once a week is more than I call anyone, Phoebe says. They cry.

“You have to stop talking to her, I think all the way. You are crying every day, and you are hurting yourself so much you can't do anything else. You have become your worst self. I hate how you act right now. She has been so disrespectful to you and to me and to us. You hurt me too when you talk to her.”

We call again, to break up. Sophie says she is not certain about dating her girlfriend. I tell her to keep her heart safe, and to protect this other girl too. She apologizes more than anything, she can't ask anything of me, she hurt me badly, and all the effort she can muster is going towards becoming the type of person who won't hurt me again.

"Don't you mean you want to be the type of person who won't hurt anyone like this again?"

I tell her she doesn't have to worry about hurting me in the same way, that she has already really done the most she could ever do.

"You can't want to work on yourself for me."

I want to hug you and the thought of touching you makes me flinch. My eyes swell.

"I'll always love you."

"I will too."

"I'll probably see you in the future. There aren't a million girls in the country and there aren't a million girls in Chicago, and there aren't a million girls in Chicago who click like we did. But I can't want it to happen."

"I want it to happen. I miss you."

"I don't. More than anything I don't."

“I’m sorrier than you could know.”

I block and unblock Sophie. I like her posts about me. Sophie likes mine about her, and then I get scared and sad, and I block her again.

I text Sophie. Every opening, “I know I’m being selfish. I understand if you hate me. I miss you more than you know.”

I want her to hate me. I am too weak to cut Sophie off all the way and am doing this worse routine where everything is as bad as it could get, and I don’t want any responsibility. Sophie isn’t really my friend at this point. She’s so forgiving and caring it makes me want to be sweet to her, and this makes me sick. I start to be venomous to her, and I cannot let her be so distant from me that I could hope to heal.

I meet a girl at the bar, she tells me she sells mushrooms. I go to her house to buy them. I take my jacket off, I am wearing a tank top underneath with no bra. I think she is wearing those femboy shorts. She gets a visible erection, and neither of us mention it. She sells me double what she meant to because she cannot find her scale. I try to imagine she gave me extra because she thinks I am hot, or because I have to

imagine she gave me special treatment, even though I really think she believes she gave me what I paid for.

Phoebe and I take the mushrooms together. I only get indigestion. I am really worried that I will text Sophie when I am high. I do not. Phoebe encourages me to take another dose two days later. I grind them up and drink them with lemon juice.

I get high and I sit on the couch and I am watching a movie. I want a girl to cut me open and pull my guts out and show them to me. I want her to chew on me and break my bones and put me together wrong. It's very ero-guro. It would be nice and intimate to be disassembled and broken by someone. I am reminded of when Sophie talked about this. She said this type of thing was always very appealing to think about. I text her and apologize so much, for reaching out, and for cutting her off, and for blocking and unblocking, and for being so stupid and high right now and I know I will regret this later. Sophie saw I posted about how I had emotionally intense sex with her this summer. She says that this framing has helped her make sense of things too.

“I think you got me into a dominant mindset more than anyone has before, or it felt distilled because it was really all I could think about with you.”

I ask her how she gets into space, and I cannot be dominant right now and am trying to get what she has. Sophie says she feels understood with me more than anyone before, and that she really trusted me.

“I want to be a dog again but I think that part of me belongs to you.”

She tells me she thinks of being stepped on and hit, and I tell her I think of doing the same to her.

“This would be so perfect to hear but you really were mean to me, even before I left the city. You were supposed to take care of me after and it never happened... You changed how I think about sex. I can't fuck anymore because I feel you totally objectified me, and I get so dysphoric I can't even let Phoebe touch me now. I can only masturbate, and then it feels like it's self harm, because I can't think of anything but fucking you.”

I leave out the part where fucking her is my nightmares and dreams too.

Soph tells me she is so easy if I want her, and that she is tight. She says she is easy to finger and tight when you fuck her, which I think is how fucking works, and she has told me

this before. It has never really been exciting to hear and it has always been crass when she has said it before. Soph says she can really take so much, and she thinks of being hurt all the time and spat on, and she wants my fingers on her teeth and on the inside of her throat. And me too. I say it quick like a mistake. I am still high on mushrooms but I know it is immature to blame substances for the way you act under the influence.

“This is so selfish of me to say. I want to do so much to you until I collapse.”

“Please don’t ever apologize to me again. I was so mean to you. Everything is my fault and I can’t ever even begin to make up for it. I love you so much. I’m still in love with you.”

“I know you’re in love with me. I have tried so long not to know it.”

I am intimidated, and confused, and I shift the topic to the movie I am watching, and the music I am listening to. I think the breaks are chopped so well in one track, and she is sober and has great taste and tells me I am really high, that it is a boring song. She is right, I agree later. I say goodbye before Phoebe comes back. I am so terrified they will be upset with me that I do not tell them anything. I tell them even what they are getting when I buy them Christmas gifts in October.

I'm at work the next day, and it's slow. I text Soph to let her know I will block her again. I check her blog immediately after.

"I've been blocked, unblocked, blocked, unblocked, blocked. LMAO."

I unblock her and apologize. I apologize for reaching out the day before, and it was so unbelievably mean of me, and this is I think really the cruelest I have been in my entire life.

"I treat you so fucking awful all the time now. I wish you would hate me so bad, and maybe I act this way because I want you to hate me or maybe I am really crazy. I want to believe you were right and that I did fuck with your feelings. It was never my intent. I think I did really treat you sometimes like we were more than friends, and it was unfair of me, and I have treated you so fucking bad since Chicago."

"What the fuck are you saying. I can't handle this. Everything was so much fucking easier when you did nothing wrong and it was all my fault, and now you say that I'm not crazy, and you acted weird and led me on, and it's too much. Please take it back, for me."

"I don't know really how I feel about anything anymore angel. I don't want to have been injured like this. I want everything to be

true so you were perfectly justified, and in reality it probably really is a complicated situation. It hurts so bad to talk to you right now, and more than that it is so evil of me because I really know I only make things worse.”

“I never want to stop being in love with you.”

“What about your girlfriend?”

“I don’t love her. I want to keep being in love with you. All we ever do is hurt each other and I love you so much.”

“I’m so sorry that we are in this stupid fucking toxic yuri situation.”

“It is soo yuri.”

“You really don’t want to stop being in love with me?”

“I never want to hurt you again. I want to be your puppy again, and I can stay in love with you and I want you to be in love with me. I miss you so bad and I am so fucking sorry. I really love you.”

“Girl.” “I can’t.”

I block Sophie again.

After work I cry and tell Phoebe what I did and what has happened. They ask why I lied to them and if I love them still. It is obvious she was in love with you. I feel horrible and deserve it. I apologize and say they deserve better from me or than me because it is the truth. I want Phoebe to get mad and yell and

hit me because I am crazy and I need permission to feel bad, or just because I am crazy and it is hard to make sense of why I want this to happen.

Phoebe asks if I want to break up and I say no, and I hold them. They hold me too. We cry. They will break up with me for real if I talk to Sophie again, and this whole thing has to stop now, yesterday, forever.

Phoebe takes me to the grocery store to pick out foods I promise to eat. I pay for the groceries, and Phoebe says I really sincerely have to start eating breakfast again. It works. It is disgusting enriched chocolate milk and I feel lowly. It is simple and confusing and I think it is working.

## X

It's been all of July and August and September and I still wish I could reach out to you for comfort. I need you to tell me it'll be okay and touch my hair and be gentle with me different than Phoebe is, who I need too. I can't have this situation because it is totally imaginary and was only even close to real for one episode of The X-Files. I am filling out job applications and I need you to squeeze my hand the whole time. I want to be a mother so bad, and I was with you, and I let so much happen between us because of it. I have not gained my weight back. My body changed after you, because of you, and my clothes don't fit the new me. I don't even know when to start regretting everything. And I love you still, of course.

I am thinking about this again and I have nightmares still. Sometimes it is fucking, often it is meeting you again. I am in Chicago and I am at the club and I have to talk to you and I hold you and hug you and get so heavy I collapse. I cry so many tears I melt.