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THE TINY TABLE IN THE COFFEE HOUSE

Nina Carrino

Today I sat at that same tiny table in the corner of the coffee house; the table where we sat for our last date. A time before we knew or wanted to know. That small circular high top wooden table cozied up against the floor to ceiling window overlooking the pristine square. The circumference of this table is no larger than a car tire, but we did not mind back then. Perched over the tiny table, our hands orbited one another, our knees kissed, and our foreheads inched close, smiling.

Now, I sit here, my knee propped against the singular central column table leg, facing an empty chair. I never noticed before that the design on the back of the chair resembled a crate. Now, the table feels humungous, stretching like the wingspan of a raven, walling me in. I try to fill the empty space, littering the glossy surface with my coffee mug, my purse, my upside-down sunglasses, my book, and my phone. I arrange these items carefully like toppings on a pizza, wary of negative space like my 8th grade art teacher cautioned. “You know you have too much negative space in your work when you take a look back at it and it feels empty or wrong.” I sigh into my chair and stare at the empty fullness sprawled before me.

Suddenly, a freight train of memories plunges through my chest. Dust collects in my eyes, clouding my vision, creating a film. I watched the film like a silent movie. Black and white images, faded around the edges, flashed before me: the doorway to my freshman dorm room, doused in florescent light, where you kissed me for the first time; the bus stop on Cedar road where you held me close under the single street lamp after our first date; the soft lawn where we stargazed during finals week, the grass luminous with dew. Every tender moment pulsed and dobbled with the rhythm of the train as it chugged away over the hill. Trumpet fanfare. A cursive The End flourished like a flag. Click. The screen went dark as the film ran out, rattling in the din.

I rubbed the dust from my eyes. I was back in the bustling coffee house, out of the dark theater. My coffee had gone cold. A beam of sunlight had spilled over half of the table like honey: thick, rich, and viscous. It glazed my mug, purse, sunglasses, book, and phone screen, making them gleam. A tiny curl tangled on my cheek as I turned my face to the long window, watching as that golden orb lower like the New Year's ball in Times Square behind rounded leaves and peaked roofs.

The sun understands that all things reach an end, so do trains and films, and even that waitress who is giving me the stink eye from behind the counter as the lingering patrons sidle out of the glass door. The curl in my cheek found a friend on the other as I collected my table toppings, wiping the honey from them as they disappear in my purse. I hop down from my high chair and take one last glance at the vacated tiny table. The honey had now spread over the rest of its face, a sticky, shiny, sun impersonator. One more silent farewell, a ding from the bell, I stride out of the clear doors of the coffee house, leaving the tiny table to the dusk.