

Eden had emailed to tell me her grandfather was dying, and that it was why she'd returned to Hong Kong. It hadn't been to say hello, how are you, or to explain what had happened to her; it'd simply been out of obligation. I hated how happy that email had made me. How I'd gasped, how I'd cried. How I'd written and rewritten my response to pave my way to meeting her at a cafe in Central, where potted plants fanned their evergreen leaves over the tables. A part of me had hoped that the news of her grandfather was just a ploy to see me. That really, she only wanted to see me.

"Mila! I'm sorry I'm late," she said. She sat down across from me, floating into her seat as one would descend from a cloud. Her long black hair was pulled back into a high ponytail, a lock pulled out on either side to frame her cheeks. She sat elegantly; arms folded on the table. Carefully decorated acrylic nails tipped each of her fingers, shifting from lilac to periwinkle under the lights. She was a stranger who had the same smile as someone I once knew.

"It's fine, no worries," I said. The memory I had of her—a doll I had kept in the attic of my brain—then began to fade into the woman I saw in front of me. Beneath her eyeshadow, I recognized the almond curve of her lash lines. When she pushed the stack of napkins to align perfectly perpendicular to the table's edge, I suddenly remembered that habit of hers. And when she looked at me, she did so the same way she had when we were kids, when we would spot each other through a thinning crowd at school. It was her. Eden.

"It's been so long! How are you?" she asked, the excitement in her voice slightly heavy. I saw that our past was simmering in the pit of her belly; she anxiously tapped her thumb against the back of her hand.

I wanted to leap across the two feet between us and melt into her. To feel her all over me and prove to myself that she was real. My hands hungered for her face, craving a chance to remap its surface and learn how it had changed. To learn what ten years had done. I didn't have the words to say these things out loud. She looked uncomfortable – like we were already sitting too close together.

She cleared her throat. “What are you doing now?”

“Working. I'm the PA for a few psychiatrists,” I said, still processing. “I've already ordered. Do you want anything?”

“Oh, right. Give me a second.” She pushed her chair back as she stood and made her way over to the counter. Her heels clicked against the wooden floor, her loose black trousers rippling with each step. I looked down at my scuffed white Nikes, at the ripped cuffs of my jeans. The baggy T-shirt I wore wasn't loose enough – it still curved slightly around my breasts. It was my day off, but if I had known she'd show up looking like that I would've dressed for the office. On her way back, I recognized that her silver belt buckle belonged to a brand whose name evaded me.

“So, assistant to psychiatrists, huh?” She sat back down.

“Yeah. You?”

“I'm an accountant. Law firm.”

“Ah.” I pressed my palms together between my thighs. There was so much I wanted to know, to say, to do, but it all compounded into a giant wad of nothing. I focused on my warped reflection in the faux gold ring I wore on my index finger. Suddenly my shaggy short hair no longer felt chic – just childish.

She bit down on the inside of her mouth. “I'm happy to see you,” she said.

“Me too. To see you,” I replied. Our eyes met, and I searched for something I

couldn't quite find. I waited for her gaze to soften, for her brow to lift, but instead her stare stayed opaque. Slightly cold.

"Well. Gung Gung's dying," she said. Soft, but to the point.

A server brought our drinks to the table, naming them as she placed them down in front of us. I didn't take my eyes off Eden, afraid to look away.

"I'm sorry. Is he sick?"

"No. Just old age," she said.

Flashes of Lee Gung Gung sparked in me: his warm leather smile, the hunch of his back. His walk alone had made me realize that he was once a great and powerful man. One who kept people close and treasured those who were closer. He had smelled of withered pages and sandalwood. It never occurred to me that he could die; he looked to have already lived more than a single lifetime.

"He asks me about you. All the time," Eden continued.

I frowned. "What do you tell him?"

"That we haven't talked, so I don't know much about you anymore."

"Why?" The question hung there between us. We both understood that I wasn't asking why she would say that, but rather why we hadn't talked. It'd been a decade of complete silence, and it hadn't been due to my lack of trying.

When Eden had left Saint Nicholas International School, I'd guessed that it was because of her mother, Auntie Lee, that our communication had been severed. Auntie Lee had monitored Eden's online activity then, and after she'd discovered what had happened between Eden and me, I imagined that it'd been easy for her to wipe those accounts clean. To change Eden's email and her phone number. All so that I had no way to reach Eden when Auntie Lee then uprooted her from the city and moved her as far away from

me as possible. But there was only so much a mother could do. What had happened after Eden graduated high school, when she'd been allowed back into the world on her own? She could have easily found me, but when I'd tried to find her, there was nothing. No Instagram page, no Facebook. As if she truly did disappear.

It'd been a choice, then.

She'd chosen to preserve the clean cut her mother had made for her.

I picked up my iced coffee and drank.

"It's a long story, Mila," she said.

I licked the coffee from my lips. "And I'm listening."

Eden fingered the handle of her teacup. Her eyes darted to-and-fro, as if reading through her thoughts in the air. Then, she explained, "My family and I moved to Texas, where my uncle lives. I was homeschooled for Junior and Senior Year, and after that I went to NYU on my own. But by then... It was just easier. To not. You know?"

Easier. What a word.

"I'm sorry," she finished. It was too rehearsed, too empty. Like she'd been told the exact response she had to give.

"So, what now?" I asked.

"I'd like for you to see Gung Gung before it's too late. Only if you want to, of course."

I took a deep breath.

"And I'd really like to be friends. That is, if you don't—"

"I don't," I nipped.

She closed her mouth and stared. We swapped places; now she searched through me, for a tell or a blush. For any indication that I, in fact, was still in love with her. It

surprised me that she thought she could find anything. She was the reason why I'd gotten so good at hiding.

"I don't," I firmly repeated.

She nodded. "Good. That's good."

We spent the rest of the hour talking about our classmates and what they'd been up to. How the third friend of our old trio, Anika, had felt after her parents' bakery had filed for bankruptcy. Eden ended the conversation the moment the clock struck five and I offered to walk her to her bus stop. The double-decker she had to catch had already arrived, and the line of people for it slowly shuffled forward. I made sure to keep in step with her with at least a foot of space between us. Any closer and I would've given in and held her hand.

"My mom wants to invite you to dinner before you visit Gung Gung. Just you and her," she started.

Auntie Lee, the last time I'd seen her: mouth wide, bared teeth damning. Fingers flexed like talons. She had swooped down and clawed at the duvet. "Get up. *Get up.*" Eden and I had squirmed like maggots under siege.

"She wants to see how you're doing," Eden finished.

"Sure."

"Awesome. I'll email you the details?" It was almost her turn to get on, the beeps from the Octopus card scanner a kind of countdown.

"Yeah, email works." I stepped back. I guessed I hadn't proved myself enough for things to be more personal than email. She climbed on, turning only to wave, then vanished up the stairs.

When we first met, we were seven years old. She had soft eyes and a helmet of black hair, the bangs across her pale forehead stick straight. I had just begun attending Saint Nicholas International School, and it was both of our first days of the First Grade. She smiled at me, our desks opposite one another in class. I smiled back, desperate to make a good impression on my assigned 'New Student Buddy'. She placed her pencil case perfectly parallel to the top edge of her desk, right beside her name tag. Everyone else had their things haphazardly strewn about.

“Where’re you from?” the girl sitting next to Eden, Anika, asked me. She had thick wavy hair and tanned skin darker than my own. She and Eden spoke like they’d known each other for years, and I felt like the odd one out.

“Los Angeles,” I told her.

“Where’s that?”

“The States.”

“My auntie lives there! In Boston.”

The boy beside me overheard and piped in, “My dad goes to Florida for work sometimes.” The way the group began trying to outdo one another was strange to me, but an unfamiliar pride swelled in my chest. I had never really been an American in America. I’d constantly vied for validation in that country; had an insatiable need for people to be blind to the Filipino features I’d inherited from Mom, and solely acknowledge Dad’s surname. He’d been born and bred American, just like me – why then, had I been

different?

I turned to Eden. “Have you been to the States before?”

She nodded.

“Where?”

“New York City,” she said. Her voice was almost drowned out by the others.

“Oh. I’ve never been there. Just seen it in the movies,” I said.

“It’s like here. With the big buildings.”

“What big buildings?”

The Saint Nick campus wasn’t tall, but wide. It sat further inland in the New Territories and was close to the greenest mountains, its structure enclosed by them. The buildings around the campus were mostly low rises save for some that belonged to private apartment estates. From what I knew, New York was the opposite: skyscrapers all around, with its nature entrapped within strict concrete parameters. Where we were was nothing like that.

“The ones in Central. Have you seen them?” Eden asked.

That was when it made sense to me. I had only been to Hong Kong Island—where Central was—once at that point. It was across the harbor with buildings that stretched up into the blue, their pointed roofs digging into the firmament. It was a place of metal and glass, narrow alleyways, and rickety trams. I recalled the multitude of bodies that had milled about, each pulled forward by the magnets of their destinations, their mouths full of words I didn’t understand.

“Oh yeah, those do look like New York,” I said. The heart of Hong Kong felt like an entirely separate place compared to the New Territories and Kowloon; one where the horizon was always hidden by its concrete bones. It came as a shock when I later learned

that some of those buildings were even taller than the Empire State.

Eden reeled me back from my imagination with a question. “Amilia, why were you here first?”

“Huh?”

“Why were you in here first? Before us?” It took me a second to realize what she was getting at. I’d been the only student in the room when the rest of my classmates were brought in by the TA.

“Because my mom teaches the other class. 1C,” I started. Just as it was my first day at Saint Nick’s, it was Mom’s first day as one of its new teachers. I’d arrived early with her to help her prepare her class across the hall. I’d made sure that all the decorations we’d spent the last two weeks on were in place and that every table group had their stationary box evenly filled. Five pencils, two sharpeners, one set of colored markers. After I’d finished my to-do list, Mom had introduced me to my class teacher herself and I was told to sit at my desk and wait for the others. “And you can call me Mila. That’s my nickname,” I finished.

Eden squinted at me. “But my friend’s in that class. Her teacher’s name is Ms. De Vera. Your last name is Edwards.”

I explained that Edwards was Dad’s last name and that Mom used to be Mrs. Edwards. Before they had broken up. This only confused Eden more.

“Parents can’t break up, Mila,” she said. Our class teacher clapped her hands together to gather our attention for morning prayer.

I shrugged. “Mine did.”

Mom still had been working at Saint Nick's when Eden had reached out to me after our ten years apart, which shocked me when I thought about it. Twenty whole years at that school. Mom had once stressed how ravenous for all things 'new' she'd been as a young adult; spurred on to move across the Pacific Ocean for California. *West is best*, she'd thought. There, she had gotten married, had me, and then had gotten divorced. The West had been tainted for her, serving only as a reminder of her youth spent on Dad. So, she had taken me and moved back East, closer to—but not quite—home. I guessed that all of that had made her finally full; she managed to stay put.

"How's Eden? Is her grandfather alright?" Mom asked from the kitchen. I'd gone back to her little apartment for Sunday dinner. Its living room, dining room and kitchen were so small, we didn't have to yell to be heard.

"Not really. They think he'll be gone in a month," I said from the couch.

"Oh, golly," she replied. A lot of Mom's sayings were mimeographed from the movies she'd seen in the 80s; the staple Americana of the time had made its rounds around the Philippine capital, and it had entranced her. These sayings, when said by her, made people's heads here turn in confusion. In Manila though, it was the norm. Mom was hip.

"She said I can go visit him. In the hospital."

"Really?"

"Yeah." It was a half-truth, like most truths were between us. The other half I kept to myself was the condition strung to the invitation: the dreadful dinner with Auntie Lee. If I mentioned it, Mom would ask why that was a requirement and point out the

strangeness of the request, especially since Eden was not going to be there. I imagined that the more she would press, the clearer it would be that I was hiding something from her. Hiding a lot from her, actually.

Mom brought out a bowl of sinigang along with a plate of rice and placed them onto the dining table. I got up from the couch and walked the five steps over. The sour, tamarind tang of the broth wafted up in wisps of steam and I sat, excited. It was only when I'd moved out that Mom began making more Filipino dishes for my visits, as if she needed something other than her company to incentivize me. She sat down and lifted her right hand to her forehead to start the Sign of the Cross, her eyes fluttering shut. I followed while watching her, taking my hand from my forehead to my chest, to my left shoulder and then to my right.

*Bless us, oh Lord, and these thy gifts
which we are about to receive
from Thy bounty,
through Christ, Our Lord.
Amen.*

We closed off the prayer with another Sign of the Cross and started to eat. I had always liked watching Mom pray. She was consistent: hands clasped loosely together, memorized prayer leaving her lips in a single breath, eyes closed in devotion. Originally I'd wanted to catch a mistake – a misremembered word or an accidental opening of the eyes before the final 'Amen'. But as I got older, the reasons why I'd watched shifted from a game to admiration (I'd wanted to love God as much as she did), to confusion (how could she believe in Him? After all she'd been through?), to hate (how dare she force me into this fucking cult), and at the end, indifference.

I only practiced Catholicism when she was around.

“What did Eden say?” she asked. She ladled more soup onto my rice.

“About?”

“About why she left! Where did she go? What happened?” There was a word for people like Mom in Tagalog: *chismosa*, *noun*, *a woman who loves to gossip*. I told her what Eden had told me. Texas, homeschool, NYU, easier.

“Anak, that doesn’t answer *why* she left.”

Me, at sixteen: one foot stuck in a dream, and the other in reality as I’d scrambled out of Eden’s bed. The autumn air had slapped my bare skin cold. I’d shivered in my underwear.

“She didn’t say. Maybe her parents just thought it’d be best,” I replied.

4

Eden, my New Student Buddy, told me that Catholics weren’t allowed to ‘break up’. At seven, things were either allowed or not allowed, yes or no, black or white.

“Who says?” I asked.

“The Bible,” she said.

“It doesn’t say that.”

“Yes, it does.” Eden was adamant. She shot her hand up into the air, waving over Sister Margaret. We were in Bible Study, and as first graders that meant things like coloring in cartoon renditions of different biblical figures, or a read-along to a

VeggieTales Bible story. Sister Margaret was one of the few nuns that taught at Saint Nick's, back when the school required that all religious studies were to be taught by someone of the Order. She glided over to us, her black habit hovering just a millimeter off the ground. She was on the older side with wrinkles around her low hanging cheeks.

“Yes, Eden?”

The tops of my ears began burning.

“Does the Bible say that parents can break up?” Eden asked her.

Sister's glanced tentatively at me. I looked away. My heart raced like it had back in Los Angeles, back with Dad, as if I was on the precipice of trouble.

“Well, yes and no. It's only allowed in certain situations,” she answered.

“What kinds of situations?” Eden asked.

Anika raised her ear towards Sister, showing that she, too, was curious. I was mortified at what Sister could possibly say next, sure that she was about to list the ways Dad had made Mom cry. Had made me cry. And that everybody was about to find out what he'd done and then treat me differently.

“That's for the Church to decide,” Sister said.

Eden and Anika frowned, unsatisfied.

“Now get back to it.” Sister pointed at our half-colored Noahs and Davids.

When our bathroom break came around, my face was still burning. Anika washed her hands at the sink beside me, her silver bracelets tinkling as she rubbed her small palms together, a little enamel cake charm hanging from one of the links. It was gift from her parents, who together ran one of the biggest Indian bakery chains in Asia. Anika looked at me through the mirror with her big brown eyes as she asked, “What was your parents' situation?” Her parroting of Sister's words was obvious with the way she said

‘situation’ slowly. She reminded me of Mom then, always prodding and aching for details.

“None of your bee’s wax,” I said.

“I won’t tell anybody,” she replied, despite there being at least three other girls in the bathroom with us. I hadn’t even told Eden – what made her believe I would tell her?

“I said. It’s none. Of your. Bee’s wax,” I snapped harsher than I wanted to. She jumped. My head was buzzing, heart pounding. I was so angry, but at what? At whom? At everybody, it seemed. I turned to take some tissues from the dispenser, ripped out a sheet, and fiercely wiped my hands clean – it was the only thing I could take my anger out on, fully. After I tossed it into the trash, I stormed out of the bathroom and back into class, not realizing that I’d left Anika in tears. She ran in crying to Sister Margaret. Our classmates stared.

Eden was the only one who stayed focused on her coloring.

5

Anika stayed mad at me for days. She ignored any move I made towards her. My offering of a colored pencil had been met with raised brows, one of a sharpener received a grand turn of her cheek. I noted to myself that after this blew over, I’d have to be careful and toe the line between Anika’s amicability and her rage.

“Here, Eden. My mom told me to share with my friends,” she said, passing over me to hand Eden a chocolate Pocky stick. Eden took it. A boy at our table caught the

exchange and asked, “What about me? I’m your friend, too.”

“Me three,” another echoed him.

Before long, the entire class gravitated to her, their palms up and hungry. She was torn: should she save some for herself and possibly ostracize kids other than me, or hand out what little she had left? She snuck a glance at me to see if I was watching. I was. And just like Jesus and the five thousand, she began dividing the sticks up amongst the crowd, ensuring that everybody had at least an inch each.

The ripping of a page from a notebook spine caught my attention. I looked at Eden as she placed the freed page onto her desk. Snapping her own stick, she placed half onto the sheet and the other half into her mouth. She checked to see if Anika was looking—she wasn’t, too busy bathing in the chorus of thanks around her—and proceeded to fold the sheet over so that the halved stick was tucked neatly within the fold. She pushed it towards me. We shared a smile so wide that we almost broke into laughter. Anika was going to have her little tantrums, but it was clear that Eden and I would brace them together. I took the little parcel and ate its contents fast; it was like it was never there. The only sign that showed otherwise was a smudge of brown across the faint printed lines. Eden had given me the piece with the most chocolate on it.

At recess, Anika refused to play with me.

“No,” she said. She clutched a pink jump rope to her chest, withholding it from not only Eden and me, but from a couple other girls who had come over to play double-dutch.

“There’re only two ropes, Anika. We need both,” a girl said.

“I’m not playing if she is.” Anika glared at me with a hatred so pure, only a

seven-year-old with a vendetta could've boiled it.

“Then don't play. Just give us the rope so the rest of us can,” another girl piped up. The seconds were passing – recess was only an hour long and it often zipped by.

“No!” Anika held onto the rope tighter. I felt guilty; I was wasting everybody's time by standing there, muted and without an argument. I'd been the one who had bitten back at Anika and had sparked her tirade. I'd been the one who had really hurt her. I hadn't wanted to, but I had, and everybody was being punished for it. I said, “It's okay. I'll play somewhere else.”

I desperately searched the podium for options. There was a group playing soccer at one end. Another twirled hoola-hoops into the sky or swished them around their waists. At the opposite end to soccer, there was a group playing kickball, their bright green rubber ball flying between pairs of hands after it had been launched by a foot.

“Yeah. Go,” Anika huffed.

I didn't need to be told twice. I bolted for the kickball group, eyes stinging, feeling a familiar sense of self-hate dig into my chest. It infected me; I hated myself for having lost control in the bathroom. For being angry when Anika had just asked me a question. Everything was my fault, and it always was. Why did I think I could suddenly have friends when I made so much go bad? Just as it had with Dad?

I filed into the kicker line. Nobody in front of me noticed, too busy watching the ball bounce as players on the field ran to catch it. Those positioned on the bases screamed that they were open as the runner made his rounds. From the corner of my vision, I saw the bright ropes being unwound where I had left the girls. I kept telling myself not to cry.

“Can I be on your team?”

I turned around. Eden smiled. Had she followed me? I hadn't seen her play

kickball before, not even once.

“What are the rules?” she asked, as though she’d read my mind.

Just seeing her there scraped all the hate I was feeling off of my chest. Tears tumbled out of me, and I tried to blubber out the rules about the bases, the catchers, and the runners. She pressed her lips together in concentration, ignoring the mess on my face.

“Okay. Got it,” she said.

As our game went on, Anika’s ropes slowed to a stop. The girls around her looked over at us, ears perked by our yells and hollers, by our chants of, “Go, go, go!” Their curiosity got the best of them and they ran over, adding to the kicker line until the game needed to pause halfway to redistribute players to teams. I looked back out onto the podium where we’d left Anika, and she was skipping with her ropes all by herself.

Once the whistle blew, everybody brought their toys over to the collection box. I pulled up the hem of my uniform polo shirt to wipe the sweat off my forehead. Eden used her collar. Anika, from behind me, tapped my shoulder.

“I forgive you now,” she said. Both ropes were balled up in her hands.

I didn’t know what to do. The shift was so sudden, and I was rarely in a place to either accept or deny forgiveness. She pouted – the puppy-dog-look without the begging eyes.

“You have to say sorry now, too,” Eden said to her.

Anika stopped pouting. “But I didn’t do anything.”

“You know what you were doing.” Eden took a step forward, overshadowing me. It was amazing – she had the words my mouth couldn’t find. She stood as tall as she could, shoulders squared and firm. She felt bigger than me, although I was a full inch taller. Anika looked back and forth between us. Then, she said begrudgingly, “Fine. I’m

sorry, Mila.”

Eden softened. She turned to me. “Do you forgive her?”

It was all happening so fast; my mind was lagging and I couldn’t speak. I nodded hastily, desperate for it to be all over. Eden and Anika beamed.

“Friends?” Anika asked.

“Friends.” Eden said.

I nodded again, relieved, feeling things settle back into stasis. As we lined up to be taken to lunch, I sent up a silent prayer to thank God that out of all the girls in our grade, Eden was the one who’d been assigned to be my New Student Buddy. That between Anika and I, she’d chosen me, and shown me she was mine.

I was ecstatic to think she was mine.

6

After dinner with Mom, I took a bus back to Hong Kong Island, where I lived in a shared apartment with four strangers. I had seen Eden in the flesh a mere five hours ago – I still couldn’t believe it. She felt like an illusion, and I ached to touch her. I should have, even if it was only a fingertip to her shoulder or a brush of the backs of our hands as we walked to her bus stop.

My apartment was tiny: it appeared smaller than Mom’s, having been subdivided into five shoebox bedrooms. It was on the 21st floor, high above the unruly urban streets whose lights didn’t go out until dawn. The entrance to the building was nestled in a nook

between a mall and a Don Don Donki supermarket; only residents and their visitors would recognize it as the entryway to an estate. I punched in the gate code, took the lift up, and walked down the fluorescent tiled hall to my door. Rather than a key, it took another code on a keypad to enter.

I'd been proud when I'd first moved in. The rent took a little less than a third of my pay per month, and Mom wasn't there to ask if I prayed before bed. Although the 'living room' could only accommodate two people at a time and I shared the kitchen and bathroom with people whose names I didn't know, I was independent. Self-sufficient. It was enough.

But as I went into my room that night and locked the door behind me, it seemed like it had all shrunk. Instead of being cozy, it was suffocating. The floor was as wide as a double bed, the bed itself a loft whilst the space under had been arranged into a meager work area. My makeshift closet was a foldable, accordion plastic shelf from Ikea that hung from a metal rod. My shoe rack was a hanging cloth with pockets on the back of my room door. I wondered what Eden would think if she came over. How her slender body would seem giant if framed by the doorway. Would the intimacy—forced on us by space alone—be too much for her? Would she refuse to take a single step through the front door?

I took my cigarettes and a lighter from my desk and opened the window behind it. Unlike Mom's there was no grate that crossed over from sill to sill, which I thought was strange. I guessed that adults liked feeling as though they had a choice. I climbed over my desk, keeping my legs inside as I sat on the ledge, and leant against the opened glass. The August air was stuffy and humid but still, it was a comfort. I lit a cigarette and took a drag, tapping the ashes out onto the street below.

Eden was probably staying in her childhood apartment with her family now that she'd returned. The apartment was up in the Central mountains where the roads were steep, meandering lazily from side-to-side. The higher up the mountain, the richer people were, and the Lee family was pretty much at the top. The apartment complex had architecture inspired by the French, with intricate marble carvings and decorative pillars that ran up its sides. Its lift operated on a keycard system, and the doors slid open directly into the apartments themselves. Lee Gung Gung lived at the top of this building, in the penthouse. Or used to, at least. I'd loved visiting as a kid. It'd been like teleporting to a different country.

Eden had despised it.

"I wish I could stay with you and your mom," she'd told me once.

"Why? You live in a castle."

"It's cold in there."

I didn't know if she thought the same now. I'd just seen who she'd become. That woman at the cafe didn't seem to care where I lived anymore, let alone want to stay with me. And yet? I was shaking the urge to leave my room and hail a cab – to make it up that mountain once more and ring her. Did the same doormen work her building? Would they recognize me?

My phone buzzed in my pocket. Another email.

Mila –

Thanks for seeing me. As promised, here are the details for the dinner with my mom:

7:30pm @ La Vie in Central, Pottinger Street

Aug 12 - Saturday

The reservation is under my Mom's name: Mrs. Athena Lee.

It's a fine dining restaurant, so please prepare accordingly.

Dress business casual. Don't stress too much, okay? Just be
you.

Hope to see you soon,

Eden

I laughed. What were we, co-workers? I set my phone down onto the desk and took another drag, underlining the slight jabs in my mind ('prepare accordingly', 'dress business casual'). I wanted to hit something. I wanted to rip the metal rod from the ceiling and smash the walls down. How dare she talk to me like that? Like I was an idiot who didn't know the difference between a dessert fork and a main course fork?

It struck me then that, if I saw a full dining set in front of me, I really wouldn't know one from the other. 'Fine dining' was lost on me; what did that even mean? What kind of food did that entail? Eden was right. She was always right. At least that much hadn't changed. I inhaled the thick, charred smoke into my lungs and held my breath. I held it so long that my vision blurred, and my hands went numb. When I released it, I felt as though the weight of my body had left through my mouth, leaving me as light as air. I collected the saliva from my teeth and spat out onto the street, ridding my tongue of the taste.