

I LOVE YOUR SOFT RED INSIDES WITH ALL THE CARE
YOU WOULD NEVER ALLOW YOURSELF TO FEEL NOT
EVEN FOR YOUR SEMI-SERIOUS GIRLFRIEND YOU
ONLY SEE AT PARTIES

the bump bump bump of stitches inside your lip, the ragged open hole of a lost tooth. your mouth is so so red, your stained tongue darting out, in out, in. testing, feeling out the new shape of your mouth. there's a little lisp when you tell me you still can't feel the left side, and your mouth doesn't pull all the way when you laugh and smile at what i say. but your eyes squish closed, and for a minute i can look, really look, at the gap. still stained a little, the tooth i'd run my tongue over out the back of someone's house on new years is gone, as is your selective memory of that night and now the gap between us yaws wide and i can't even remember what it was like to be that close. but you open your eyes and continue the conversation, and you tell me it doesn't hurt not at all bud, and i'm o.k. with it. it's o.k. we're in the back room of the rink, of what is ostensibly a trainers room, a first aid room. the doctor who was doing your stitches has left for a moment, and we are knee to knee, shin guards knocking each other through socks, giggling under the naked lightbulb like children. but it's not forever, and he's back and you're serious again, nodding at his orders to take care of it. you're going to be back here in a few days to get the stitches out because they're not the ones that dissolve. you're going to be back and then you're not, you're going to take your gummy gap toothed smile all the way to the show, eyes squishing shut when you're chirped good, when you're at some bar with expensive drinks and picking up. but they won't have now, won't have seen the stitches and the red of your naked flesh inside your mouth, the things that make you up, tied together after being broken and chipped. they won't have now, and i will. i'm the one carrying your helmet and your gloves and your stick back out into the cinder block hallway, back to the bright and noisy locker room. your soft polite thank you and your changed smile is enough.

I'M ALWAYS WRONG ABOUT EVERYTHING AND I
SHOULD KNOW THIS BY NOW BUT I'D RATHER
DELUDE MYSELF NOW AND FEEL TERRIBLE ABOUT IT
LATER THAN CHANGE ANYTHING

is it wishful thinking to see myself in everyone i like or am i just narcissistic enough to think anyone hot is like me in some way? you're there every practice earlier than me somehow and i say hello. there's nothing worse than a quiet awkward lockerroom, but it's not quiet for long not at all. conversation is always easy with you my heart thumps and i stutter through words my mouth can't keep up with but you don't bring it up and at every turn it's revealed that we're not so different after all. you like *gran turismo*, *prince of persia: the sands of time* (the movie of course) and skrillex. we must be the same in some profound way. but i always read too deep into your character and forget that you're just your father's son, a carbon copy that he's smudged into shape with his callous meaty hands. you're just a boy and i should know better, but when you say all that when the rest of the guys are in the room it shocks me leaves me reeling 'cause the room isn't in shock and they're all laughing, laughing at this poor kid you're gossiping about. faggot faggot faggot. i sit there with my elbow pads in my hands just staring at them as you throw your scrunched up ball of tape into the bin in the middle of the lockerroom with another snide comment, king of your godawful castle. i'm standing in the cold lake that is the melting puddle of ice off my skate blades and i should be disgusted at the bone you throw to me pulling me into the conversation but i lunge for it eager eager eager and they love my performance eat it right up. maybe you're just hamming it up for the boys. maybe you wouldn't mind so much my being a faggot if we were proper friends and you knew me and knew i wasn't like that. maybe i like you better when you're not opening your mouth to speak just look me in the eye and i'll know you don't mind not at all because you're just like me just hamming it up for the boys give them what they expect and don't stand out. it sickens me that i'm sad you're leaving this coming spring. we'll only have this one season together and i'm greedy and willing to forget a great deal and want more of you more more please god more. i'll take any bone you throw i'll fetch retrieve sit beg heel anything being left alone here when summer starts with just the memories of us will be punishment enough for my gluttony. none of the things you say wont make us any less friends than it did before. even if they hurt just a bit.

THAT NIGHT LAST SPRING YOU SAY YOU DON'T
REMEMBER BUT I CAN SEE IN YOUR EYES THAT YOU
DO YOU DO YOU DO YOU DO AND YOU HATE IT YOU
HATE ME BUT WE'RE STILL FRIENDS EITHER SIDE OF
THIS CANYON

there are three hundred things happening at once and they're all nothing. it's quiet and it's loud, there's the crash of someone going head over heels over the back of the sofa with a trayful of drinks, and everyone laughs like a laugh track before it returns to a murmur. the house is bright, glowing like the back of your hand when you put your palm over one of those superpowered flashlights. the yard is dark. it's cold. my one drunk cigarette i've allowed myself glows too; my lungs are warmed with smoke, my belly is warmed with spirits. there's another burst of ringing laughter from the house, exploding out onto the patio when you swing the door open. you slur at me about how its too hot in there, and set down the bottle you're holding a little too hard on the concrete pavers and struggle against your sweatshirt. i let myself look at your flushed red cheeks, your red mouth and the ripple of muscles under your rank sweaty white tee. it's so good in this moment, everything is warm and sharp and crisp at the edges. i can see the little white reflection of the moon in your dilated pupils and i feel like you're looking right into me and the only thing between us is your sweatshirt hanging between us. i'm kissing you. i'm kissing you and you're not kissing back. my tongue is in your unmoving mouth but we were having a moment so i give you a moment for it to register, for you to react and kiss back but you still don't move i open my eyes and your eyes are still open and i realise you were just looking through me and i should never have presumed we were anything alike and i take it all back i'm so so sorry, it'll never happen again man, i dunno what that was dude haha. and you keep saying nothing, but something shutters closed in your eyes, the moon doesn't reflect so strongly, and the house glows too bright to see the stars. we're miles from each other, so far that i may as well be the moon i saw reflected back at me. the spirits in my stomach revolt my lungs burn my eyes tear desperately and i reach out like an idiot as you leave blank-faced, back into the light and warmth of the house but my hand could never cross the distance to catch at yours not at all.

YOU'RE NOT THE FIRST TEAMMATE I'VE DRIVEN TO
THE AIRPORT BUT YOU'RE THE FIRST ONE I GOT A
TICKET FOR CRYING IN MY UGLY 2002 CAR OVER

you gotta love something if you're willing to let it hurt you this much. i console myself after every hit with that thought. i love the feeling of the stick in my hand, the perfect tape job from years of practice and a nice quiet moment in the room to do. i love freshly resurfaced ice and that first warmup lap, nothing in front of me before i sweep back to pick up a puck and begin my routine. i love the burn of my lungs, of my muscles, of my eyes against the cold rink air. i love my worn in gloves. i love my concussion-preventing helmet. i love spending all evening reviewing tape. i love studying plays while coach yells at us. i love never seeing my family. i love having everyone in my life replaced every year. i love seeing my friends do better than me and leave me behind for the show. i love seeing other friends crash and burn with injuries, never able to play again. how could i love anything that wasn't this? you're so synonymous with the game its difficult to separate the two in my mind. six months have never been so fast before in my life and i'm looking over at you sitting in my passenger seat in that fraction of a second before you snap to and jump out of my ugly orange mazda6 to grab your bag out the back. we're in the drop offs lane at the airport and soon someone will be coming up to tap on the window to tell me to move along if no-one was getting out but i take every sliver of time from that moment to memorise you. you're looking out the window and the morninglight from the sky shines through your hair and falls crisply against your cheek right down to your scarred loathsome pretty red mouth. i like the look of the team hoodie on you. technically your contract is up and you're not on the same team anymore but I'm glad you're taking something of it of us of me with you. i've done so many of these six month seasons that i mark my life by them. there will be before this moment and there will be after, a decisive split, i will never be the same as right now again and there's nothing i can do about it. the moments will carry you away from me on swift wings. back at the house we promised to keep in touch with each other. my heart is hollow at that, echoing each beat terribly lonely. you never went back on any of your promises but time will fade me in your mind and i'm sure i was never as vivid to you as you were to me.