

The Personal Ad
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My breathing was soft and the letters were black, and scratched with permanent marker on ripped paper. They screamed. The letters screamed at me, loudly, as I felt myself sink into the apartment's shadows, and I felt it. I felt all of it.

I traced my fingertip along the edges of these words shouting sentiments like disgusting, lousy, inconvenient, and worthless. They arm wrestled with the traffic outside and won, so the traffic was nothing but a quiet hum buried underneath them.

The words repeated, and I listened as they began to take form. Their shape looked like my bones, and skin, and body so I recognized them. I had never looked so articulate before.

It's amazing how inked symbols become more than just lines.

Sometimes, my skin wants to crawl far, far away from me, and sometimes, I wish I could just push it off of my bones. I wish I could just find a story to hide in, but then I realize... I've been in a story all along.

This wasn't the first time you had used words like this with me, but it might be the last. I had loved you once, a long time ago. When we were young. Before I gave in to everything, before you became a thief and stole my youth, when you were dimpled and not yet splintered. Now, we are all of those things and more.

I sat tangled on the floor, my legs crossed uncomfortably, and I brushed messes of hair out of my face. Always a mess. I let the journal pages piled on the floor loiter. They were so nasty. How could you say these things?

For this first time, I realized in the empty noise that I didn't love you anymore.

That's right - I didn't love you anymore. But how could I? You hadn't loved me in a long time.

I looked at the words that you gave me, named me, called me. The words written all over those papers. I felt them, too, even more than I saw them and slowly, methodically, I bit my lip, teeth slicing flesh and blood rushing to the surface, because blood tasted better than sweat. You see, sweat meant work, and I had promised myself I wouldn't do the work. No, not for you. Not anymore, at least.

I realized that was it: that would be the last night I held onto you. Instead, I'd let it all go, but I'd do it on my own. I wouldn't face you. I couldn't face a monster I didn't love, so I hoped you would figure it out. My departure was entropic. This story was over.

I picked myself up, and I walked through the room's guts, all the shadows, towards the floor length mirror up against the wall and looked at the silhouette. You had bitter-soft skin, bite-sized irises, and a root-tongue. I hated you.

I hated you so much, and the diluted image of you was a reflection of not just my face, but my life too. I couldn't do it anymore.

The Personal Ad

I tell you, I fell out of love.

I fell out of love with the one person I *had* to live with, and that was the worst love I could lose. I didn't want to be around you anymore, or the names you kept calling me. I wanted someone else.

I began to craft a personal ad for others to read.

This time, I carefully chose the words. Words that meant something. Words that might help me find a new love...

And with the drag of a small blade against the tight skin on my wrists, and the soft pulp of my stomach, and thighs, I scribbled the following as one, permanent note:

Accepting applications for love.

- i. Must live in the area
- ii. Must hear soft cries
- iii. Must view days as significant

Please include your:

Hopes & Dreams

Favorite word

Please answer the following questions:

- When is it convenient to love me?
- Why?

And **x** marks the spot. With one final slit, I confirmed that blood did taste better than sweat.

I kept the promise I had made to myself long ago,

I would not let you control my life.

I knew that no one would ever answer this ad. I knew that this ad was not actually for anyone else, but some researchers named Waynforth and Dunbar once said that personal ads are a good way to find potential mates for people whose social worlds have been artificially constrained...

Personal ads have also been used by criminals to find and lure victims too though.

Slowly, I felt my breath again, and with one last noiseless heave - I embraced a moment of silence, finally.