

*Earth: Six Ways to Cope with the End of the
Mercury Retrograde*

1.

Last week her moon glittered like it had been polished against the black velvet sky. Today she waned, less than lackluster. He finally stopped to take a breath and put down the razor. He hadn't even looked at a liquor store in weeks. His gruff voice melted into soft, malleable clay that she could hold in her hands and dig her fingernails into. And he loved her. He had said it, a verbal contract that could not be nullified; it was the sun's golden whisper through his glowing lips. Whatever had been burning his heels drowned in her cloudy water, never to be rekindled again.

2.

She was in dire need of a shower. In the mirror she noticed the thinning skin on her forehead and prodded at it with a chapped finger. It wasn't malleable. She spun closer to her stunning friend, consulted all the right magazines, even bought the miracle pills and diluted them in her salty stomach. Her friend huffed at her and told her to stop wearing eyeliner. He must hate the stuff. She smoothed down her rocky eyebrows and girdled her snowy thighs to her skeleton. She compressed herself into the perfect hot marble he wanted. He was a bullet and she could be the cardstock bulls-eye. All she needed was a scalpel sharp enough.

3.

She put the potato peeler back in the kitchen drawer. It wasn't fair. He was speeding up; soon her chances would be as good as gone. She began to send smoke signals his way. *Today I smashed a hurricane into my face.* He glanced at her in passing and turned another broad corner. *Why don't you stop and help me pick this splinter out of my arm?* His jaw was steel, frozen forward. Her moon withered. She chopped off her hair, scrubbed her skin raw. She opened sores, impressive ones. *See? Look what you've done.* But by that time she had to stop and catch her breath.

4.

She brought a tasteful black shawl and burrowed into it like a worm crawls into the rotting ground. She waited there for him to wake her up with open arms like a Christmas gift in dazzling silver paper. It was a festering February in between the black folds, and her only streetlight flickered.

5.

She withered and mastered the art of withering. Her sewers overflowed and she let each light bulb burst under pressure. She tattooed her face red with her couch's upholstery. Ants marched into her ears, constructing vast empires in gray dust. Her cracked lips hung open and her eyes glazed over and over. She could selfishly decompose into a fish carcass but he would saunter over her without even admiring her handiwork.

6.

Her water would always boil at 100 degrees Celsius. Her worms would always fertilize the topsoil; it was a measly two miles deep. She would look forlorn as he zoomed bright and scorching over her head, leaving her to blink out the blue floating smears he left in her eyes. She had been poisoned, and the antidote was due when he glanced over his sculpted shoulder once again, in three and a half of her restless months.

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