

Second Person

The writers are using the second person to imagine possible love affairs with each other. They read these stories out loud in a coffee shop, half seated, half leaning against a tall stool, their mouths intimate with the microphone. *You*, they read. *You come out of the shower dripping and naked. You slip your hand under the hem of my dress.*

Often, the women writers write a male *I* and a female *you*. These stories are instructions on how they want to be loved. Always desperately. Often doomed. It is not always clear to whom the narrative is addressed, but if one follows the clues—the stubbled cheeks, a train whistle coming in through a bedroom window, a part-time job as a bus driver, a familiarity with the way the early morning light falls in a certain part of town—one could hazard a guess.

The writers are using the second person as if they have only recently discovered sex and they want to tell everyone what it is like. They want you to know. That wordless expression, that zoological lust. As if their very skins were invented by someone else's fingertips. Yours.

They are using the second person as if who you love and how you touch them is the only thing. Not car loans or doctor appointments or jobs or unwashed coffee cups in the sink.

A poet arrives in town with his husband; they married in Canada before it was legal here. The other writers wonder what he knows that they don't yet.

A man writes about his love for a woman with long dark hair and she cries in the audience. She writes about eating nectarines with him in the afterlife. They do not speak to each other anymore. But they publish poems in the same journals; their thin pages touch.

A visiting writer reads about being a flounder, first a larva with eyes on each side of the head, then the metamorphosis: the migration of one eye to join the other. All those listening desire the flounder, some for being like them and others for being different. The writers touch their own eyes, orbital bones sharp against their open palms.

Eventually some of the writers will settle down. One with a man who

draws pictures of beets and green onions on the shopping list instead of writing their names. They will write the names of their spouses on their acknowledgment pages, but they will not include them elsewhere in their books. The husbands and wives will be painters, photographers, musicians, and academics of several different stripes. But now, the writers are stranded here among only their own kind. All left shoes and no right. All prongs and no sockets.

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