

The Day at the Beach

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WHEN A GIRL decides to leave you, in her head she is already gone. Every physical step she takes after that thought is a step away from you. It may seem sudden or ill-conceived, but she's been planning it for months, quietly retreating in inches that are barely visible to the naked eye. There are colonies of ants under our feet, plotting, building, and procreating—our movements should seem obvious in comparison. Still, we plot, provoke, fuck, cheat, and lie without ever being noticed. Somehow we escape reason, somehow our meaning is missed. We can leave a lover while we sit beside them. We can fuck someone else and still kiss our partner goodnight. We can look at them and see someone else; we can look right through them. Like ants, we can scurry away without ever being noticed. It all starts with a thought.

Alyson knew she would leave Leesa the day they went to the beach. The thought hadn't occurred to her before. Until this day they both assumed happiness and neither had reason to doubt. It wasn't because the beach was cold that day, or because Alyson's hair was whipping her eyes, and the sand was stinging her skin. The truth was she didn't know why the thought came. She looked at Leesa—her short curly hair blowing in the breeze, the mole on the side of neck, her freckled arms, and her green eyes—her appearance hadn't changed. In the two years they had been together, nothing about Leesa had really changed. But underneath their table-cloth of domestic normality, there was something stirring inside Alyson.

Leesa places her hand on mine; she squeezes twice and tells me she loves me. I tell her I love her too and feel for the first time that I am lying to her. Her head rests on my chest, her body fails to warm me, and I feel trapped under her weight. I tell her I want to go home, she doesn't notice the tears falling into her hair. For two years I allowed myself to imagine a life with Leesa. I pictured children that looked like her, a family, a home, and the slow steady decline into old age—the wrinkled skin, and the shared memories. I even imagined us dying on the same day because Leesa imagined it that way, and that's how we thought it would end.

If I had to list the reasons why I stopped loving Leesa I suppose I could make one, a long one, with all the insignificant reasons you would leave someone.

She stopped seeing me.

She didn't look at me anymore—she didn't try to.

She knew I would be standing in the corner of her eye for the rest of her life.

She didn't make love to me; she made love face-down to the mattress.

Our tired mattress.

Our tired life.

But I wasn't tired. I was hungry and thirsty, and Leesa no longer fed me.

I was awake and she was asleep.

So I left her while she slept.