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## **How To Love a Narcissist**

You don't.

Love is complex;  
inextricably wound in beautiful mysteries,  
like morning dew at the nape of a leaf's neck,  
gently teasing, blowing a soft kiss.

Love isn't a habit;  
the habit of sweeping your house  
or washing your dishes,  
fearing that they may pile up,  
soon wither.

Love isn't loving for the fear of losing.

It is whole – all pieces of your heart  
tightly bound together, safely nestled like  
a baby Garden Warbler with its mother.

It isn't your seclusion, at the nook of a  
party, tossed aside while they make sheep's  
eyes at others, and remark that green makes  
you look fat. It isn't the sound of the word  
love, that never reaches their eyes.

Maybe someday you'd know what love is;  
so singular, resilient, exotic,  
that you scour the world in search for it.

O Garden Warbler, look!  
broken twigs,  
thin branches,  
leafless tree,  
swept away from the rest,  
yet enough to build yourself  
an unassailable nest.

## **Ross Island, Port Blair**

*Circa 2016*

Not too long ago – recent enough to:  
pile over world events,  
heartbreak.

Alone on that island, taking selfies against the  
backdrop of trees, the sea, tumbledown buildings,  
I am a character in an art film,  
Soft piano plays in the backdrop – *Yann Tiersen*.

At a nook, through the gates of shrubbery,  
peepul trees, banyan takeovers,  
a Chital deer grazes on grass.  
I reach out, say hello, I look around,  
there's no one.

No response, I approach the deer, smugly  
because there are no antlers. So, even if I were  
to die all alone in this abandoned island,  
I wouldn't have antler shards in my stomach.

*Hi there, I say. How are we?*

The deer looks me in the eye,  
continues to graze. In a second,  
I'm within two feet of the deer. No flinch,  
eyelids don't bat, continues to graze.

The time is eleven, the ship blares.  
I wave goodbye, exit. I stand, solitarily,  
at the stern. The ship cuts through the water,  
motor runs, everything is deafening.

Sunlight brushes the trees of Ross Island, and  
me alike. There is pleasure and shame,  
in realising that I am no threat,  
no  
predator.

**Watching *La Dolce Vita* on the first date**

sage green couch  
cheese popcorn  
diet soda

my sheer fur stockings now slide uncomfortably below my hips  
when I adjust, he moves in response  
asks me if I am okay.

his favourite scene:

Anita Ekberg in the trevi fountain,  
beautiful Nordic goddess,  
jawline as sharp as a knife.

his entertainment unit is a host of awards,  
picture of a handshake with Bill Clinton,  
a framed Harvard degree,  
a Gucci  
storage box.

three hours later,  
credits roll,  
*what a sweet movie*, he remarks.

my stockings are rolled into a bunch at the nook,  
*la dolce vita*; a sweet life

slips away.

## **The first drop of red on her underwear**

is actually blue in advertisements.

The real red  
soaks into the cotton fabric,  
on the other side, it shows up as

shame.

Red *sindhoor* at the front  
where her hair parts,  
her nuptial rose-hued *saree*,

dishevelled the following morning.

Red, plump tomatoes at the local vendor's,  
cut, mutilated, ground  
into thick curry for peas and potatoes,  
The man lets out a loud

burp,  
the plate is left on the table as he washes his hands,  
gravy dries on silverware.

Red, pink baby lets out a cry,  
her eyes adjust to the bright lights,  
mother silently wishes  
that things for her would be

different.

## **Torn from Morning's Pink Azalea**

You are never warned,  
just intimated about your  
recent folly, aberration,  
like you meeting the fog on the day's drive,  
    blindsided, startled.

In the middle of the room,  
on a dresser, there's a looking glass.  
Through her, you're swallowed whole  
into your past  
    so full of colour, joy, sadness  
all quaffed by shame –

Shame; so lofty,  
clinging onto your skin like a helminth.  
The pinnacle of your cheek is red,  
so are your ears – red, so distinctly separate  
from your body  
and all of a sudden...  
cold and hot alike.

The hair on your sweater stand up  
like as if lightning were to hit the land,  
like the earth, your body cracks at the centre,  
opens its mouth wide  
resigns to its own  
    abyss.

In your movie there is mitosis,  
you split into two identical parts –  
one; embarrassed, with stifled tears in  
the girls' bathroom submerged under  
the smell of creosote oil.  
the other; watching you despise you,

wondering how love for yourself is so  
excruciatingly scanty,  
riddled with guilt,  
next to  
    nothing.

You spend the next few years learning  
love,  
through losing love. You say  
there is no learning without loss, but  
here you are; derelict,  
desperate to  
    find  
things that you can lose.

You emerge from the looking glass,  
time is like morning dew;  
tiny droplets on the Azalea's chest  
beautiful,  
    and ephemeral alike.  
When the dew drips from  
the petals, it makes the same  
    sound  
as the drops of water leaking from  
one of the many eyes of that  
old bathroom faucet  
    years ago....

    split into two;  
    irreconcilable.