

How to Predict the Weather

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You wait, You wait
You wait for summer, then you wait for rain

—“The Wait,” Built to Spill

OVERCAST

I DON'T WANT TO GO, she said.

I could just fold you up and put you in my pocket and keep you with me, he said. And he did just that, in half, then half again.

He could remember only two facts from growing up: nothing can be folded in half more than 11 times, and swallowed gum stays in your body for 7 years. He folded her in half and tucked her in. There, there.

Or, he folded as many times as he could, counting. He put her in his mouth and swallowed, pushing down his throat with index finger, inviting her to stay forever.

PREDICT THE WEATHER. Don't tell anyone, don't share predictions or spread rumors. Don't take pride in correct guesses. Keep track, logs. Ignore forecasts, percentages, possibilities. Amass records, case histories. Avoid the impulse to diagnose. Organize the data into charts, graphs, lists. Put in alphabetical order, then numerical—small to large, reverse. Randomize. Study tide tables, ebbs and flows, the phases of the moon. Repeat everything you've learned and watched and kept track of until it comes as second nature, like multiplication tables in grade school. Repeat again, then forget it all, purge. Watch the sky. Think of nothing. Close your eyes. What do you see?

HE SPILLED WINE ON HIS ARM, stained. It looked like a birthmark, a burn mark, but scratched it smelled like the bottom of something cheap and red. It grew, sometimes, formed cloud shapes on his arm, up his shoulder—zoo animals, states he'd never been to. Silhouettes of constellations. He met a girl who smoked, sprinkled her ash on her arms. The embers freckled her skin, became darker when she tanned, and he thought of clouds growing pregnant with rain. You don't drink wine, she said. I used to, he told her. She'd trace the outline with her fingertips, his hairs standing on end, veins tickling. They drove to parking lots and watched meteor showers from sleeping bags.

WHOA, DOG, he called. Heel.

I haven't taught him that yet, she said. I mostly just let him pull.

They'd talked about getting a dog since moving in together. Now, she had the puppy. He refused to call him anything but Dog.

She stopped. What do you think happened? she asked.

He looked up, saw a huge pile of discarded clothes and boxes and furniture. Like an entire apartment had pulled over to the side of the road after a night of drinking and vomited.

Somebody get thrown out? he said. He let go the leash and the dog ran around, sniffing from one artifact to the next.

She picked up a photo album, started flipping through. Wow. Look at these guys, she said. They look like everyone I went to high school with.

He walked over, looked at the pictures of a group of friends mugging for the camera. They were drinking from forties and a keg, giving the finger and devil horns. He started picking up clothes, holding them out in front of himself. He opened a drawer, found rows of videotapes.

The dog barked and he looked up, saw other people approaching as if they'd been waiting for someone else to come by and dig in first.

It's OK, Dog, he said. It's OK.

He walked over and grabbed the dog's leash, went back and continued looking through the videos. Most looked bought used from Blockbuster or the library, some had handwritten labels. She was still looking through the photo album, laughing and looking at each closely like she might find herself there in the background of one.

The last two videos in the back were unmarked and he thought they were probably blank, but also couldn't help wondering if they might be something else. He tucked them in his coat, then went and grabbed the dog's leash, started pulling him to the street.

C'mon, he called. Let's get before everyone else gets here. She walked over, still holding the photo album and bent down, petted the dog.

On the walk back, he kept thinking what they might be, the videos he'd grabbed. He imagined getting home and watching them together, locking the dog out of the bedroom and role-playing, making believe they were the two in the movie, watching themselves. Like she'd kicked him out and threw all his shit out in the street, yelled out the window at him as he drove away maybe,

but now he'd come back and they were making up. Like the dog barking outside the bedroom door had been theirs for years and he'd been harder to leave than any of his other shit, everything piled up down at the end of the block that he no longer cared about, who might be going through it, what they might be taking.

GUT YOURSELF. Slice first from wrist to elbow fold—slow and smooth, the sharper the blade the better. Remember the filet knife you gave your dad for Father’s Day when you were ten. Remember opening day every year, gutting the fish right there in the boat, letting the insides spill out into the water. Hook in your finger and scoop like that, like cleaning a fish or veining a shrimp. Invert, turn yourself inside out like a duvet, like a shirt or sock out of the dryer. Like you’d learned in youth group, bored from the sermon, to do with a Styrofoam cup: slow and careful, lest it crack and break. Spill out onto the table. A dissection. Spread out your arms, present.

SHE LIKED DRINKING in parking lots, that was his favorite thing about her. They'd go to the liquor store and buy a case of beer, or a fifth of whiskey, or a bottle of wine, or a box of wine, or sometimes even champagne, or other times a random assortment of those small, single-serving, airport-sized bottles of whatever they kept at the counter. And then go to the Walmart or the post office or a bowling alley and park and just hangout next to the trunk, or maybe pace around the lot, and they'd get drunk. She said it made her feel like she was in high school, and he knew exactly what she meant. He'd hated high school, hated all the people who loved it and missed it and pined for those days, but also kind of loved trying to recreate things he'd never created in the first place. He didn't drink in high school and had never before drank out of a cooler in his trunk, outside the automotive repair entrance of a Walmart, but he liked when they'd get back in his car and make out a nd dry hump, and maybe she'd slide her hand down his pants and jerk him off a little or she'd grab his hand and slide it under her shirt, or up her skirt, but they wouldn't go all the way because they were just teenagers, figuring it all out, though neither

ever voiced that aloud. He liked it because he'd never done that the first time around, when he actually had been a teenager, and also because they didn't have to say that's what they were doing. He liked feeling like what he assumed it would have been like to be in high school love.

Some nights they'd go to this strip mall just outside of town where the main establishment was this huge Chinese buffet that they always talked about going to but never did. There was a small place around the side of the building that, on Wednesday nights, hosted Keno, and then on Fridays, Bingo. They'd drink in the parking lot and then go in and play Keno, or Bingo, depending on the night, with all these people they'd never seen anywhere else in town. He'd wonder where they'd all come from, and he liked that about it, too.

They'd go and she would always bring this little elephant pin. She'd keep it in her pocket and then as soon as everything was ready to start, she'd take it out and ask him to pin it on her, and it would feel like attaching a corsage, or at least what he'd assumed that would have felt like, if he'd gone to a dance in high school and ever attached a corsage before.

All those times, they never won anything, but it was still fun and seemed worth it. He told her once that it didn't seem like much of a good luck charm,

since they'd never won anything, not once, but she just shrugged her shoulders and smiled. She didn't agree or disagree, didn't try to argue.