

West 10th
Silver Liftin

Under soft lights in the bars on West 10th street, he loves them all. He wants to see the inside of their lithe bodies. He used to find sexiness in lips, eyes, size, ass. Now he finds that the random shift of a muscle drives him mad. With age, desire has become less predictable. It's less about words or stark truths. It's harder to pin down objective beauty. Often, these days, beauty is the reminder of something slipping away.

After the bars, there are subways. Little cars for shuttling onward. There are pizza parlors, with harsh lighting, where the sacrifices of drink and of the night remind all of beauty's deception. Those with makeup have melted slightly, wilted. The illusion has proved itself. And the men are pathetic after drinking: their deception is most obvious in the light. Their hair has fallen, they stumble around, they have become funny. Or rather: they have drunk their self-awareness away. They drink to become a different version of themselves. To them it feels good. To others, it is vulgar. Sometimes, it evokes a sharp pity. The same pity of watching an older person who has lost control over parts of their bodies. The uncomfortable pity reserved for weak and fading things.

He is, before all else and after everything, a man. He too becomes ugly in the light. But for now, he has arrived on West 10th street and it is still early and he is still lovable.

At the bar, there is a younger girl who comes from a long line of beauty queens. Her mother was intelligent and kind. But mostly, she was a Beauty Queen. Her favorite kind of people were people who had been in love with her. There were many of these. And they all gave her the sense that they would give anything just to look at her for a little longer. The sense that they would sacrifice a great deal if it meant they could just breathe in her sighs for a few more minutes. Even after her beauty had faded, there were many former admirers who hung about and who remained close friends. Admirers last for a long time. They still see beauty in their former objects of affection, through memory. The object's beauty lives out through others. Her mother spoke of these men and women with tenderness.

Their eyes meet. *Is it me? Do you want me too?* She looks away first. Then, she looks back first. The shivering candlelight from the bar beneath her makes her top lip look full. Her face holds trembling shadows of eyelashes. Everything is delicate on her: the broader sense of her beauty being on the edge of a great canyon right before a fall, precarious, is tantalizing. Indeed, he is imperceptibly shaking at this sudden reminder that he too is alive. He finds himself fantasizing about her spidery hands, gripping the top of a wine glass. His hands have never and will never look as slender and lovely as hers. Now, his gaze now makes his desire very clear. He is proof that she is no longer in love with the last one. He is stories which she will tell her friends. He is nothing but a fragment of life-accumulation. And yet-- that is everything.

There is a mirror on the back of the bar to give the illusion of space. They take it for themselves. They trade sneaky glances at their reflections when they think the other isn't looking.

"Hi." He offers the word with a smile. She returns it, and the word: "Hi."