



LET ME SLEEP

BY CHRISTINE UTZ

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He rolls over in the bed and wraps his arms around me, nuzzling himself into the crook of my legs, his chest against my back; he thinks I'm sleeping. His breath blows across my ear and I am very much awake. I twist from his grip and shift closer to the edge of the bed; he thinks I'm having a bad dream. His body presses up to me once again and now his breath is on my neck. The hairs rise on my arm and I'm sweating from the heat that comes out of his skin. I grab his arm and move it, shift even closer to the edge, and tell him again.

"Let me sleep."

The sheets are wrapped tight around my shoulders and he pulls at them when he rolls over. He's up against the wall on the opposite side, our backs to each other. Then he kicks the sheets off and repositions himself, shaking the whole bed. I wait for him to finish his fit of protest before I fall back asleep.

It's Valentines Day. He wakes up early to go to work and I have the whole bed to myself. There's a knock on the door at half past twelve and when I open it, a vase full of tulips and a box of chocolates are on the doorstep along with a handmade card. I bring the flowers inside and fill the vase with water. He wants to take me out to dinner later.

We go to some Chinese place and sit at the end of a long table filled with other couples, leaning over their soup and talking loudly so I can hear their plans for the rest of the night.

"I need to go to bed early. I have class in the morning," I tell him.

I'm lying in his lap on the couch. He knows something's wrong because I'm not good at hiding it.

"Things aren't the same between us anymore," I tell him. He wants to know why. I can't explain it.

"Did you cheat on me?" He asks.

"No." The pillows are bunched up underneath me and I'm chewing on the corner of one.

"Is it some other guy?"

"No."

"You don't love me anymore?"

"Yeah, that's it."

He keeps a straight face through it all. He doesn't believe me. How can you just stop caring, he must wonder. I don't know. I let my words flood through the fabric of the pillow and think about making myself look sadder.

This is how an ending works. Give a reason, let him wallow, wait for the flare-up. He doesn't get mad; he won't cry. I was expecting him to cry. I hug him and he doesn't want to let go; his hands lock onto my shoulders. When I pull away and tell him I have work to do he says okay, but keeps sitting there.

"You should go," I get up from the couch.

"I know. But really, is this it?"

I move into my bedroom and he follows. He sits on my bed for another hour. I sit with him, I have to. We don't say anything to each other and I keep getting up to move around the room, trying to look busy, trying to signal to him that he needs to leave but I won't actually say it. He keeps touching me. My leg, my arm, my hair. He needs to remember them, needs to hold on to that last image of me sitting on the bed beside him breathing loudly through my nose.

I let him stay the night. Just one more time. It's three in the morning and he's past the shock and moving into a fit of shaking. I don't want him driving. The bed isn't big enough, we both are on the edges, and if I roll over I'll touch him. His fingers are on my back.

"Goodnight," he whispers.

My eyes open a minute before my alarm is set to go off. His arm is draped loosely over my stomach and I'm lying in the middle of the bed. I've stolen all the blankets for myself; his toes are freezing when my feet touch them. He's still asleep but he feels me stir and pulls me against him and I let him hold me in the last seconds before the alarm sounds.