

Thursday morning and the airport is almost devoid of people. Everyone wants to travel for Thanksgiving, but no one wants to travel *ON* Thanksgiving. But I find myself at the right gate, because I can hear a little muffled Navajo, a little quickened Spanish and the woman behind me smells like pine nuts, and I wonder if I, too, carry the smells of home with me. Only a little pidgin Spanish, enough Navajo to impress boys and I remember standing in an Idaho Albertson's with Megan, holding a bag of pine nuts to my nose, trying to draw their earthy, Christmasy scent into my soul. But the dust of the place, the orange and yellow and blood red dust is there, engrained in my skin and soaked up in my blood.

Megan looked back at me, this slim nineteen-year-old I had recently stopped introducing as my best friend, and furrowed her brow.

And sitting here, I can feel the distance between where I am and where I'm going with such acuity, for I moment I cannot be sure if I am still seated or if I am floating up above, if the string that ties me to the ground has snapped and will let me wave closer to my homeland.

A text message from Megan buzzes against my leg, but I am not prepared to deal with her family drama today. It's Thanksgiving, I want my own family drama, I want to scream at my mother and storm from the house in search of refuge. But instead, I received a call a few months ago stating that my brother was getting married and that there would be no Thanksgiving, and the wedding would be Friday, and my presence was requested but not demanded.

Three years of saving for Europe, and I get to take a chunk of it to fly home not for the holiday, but to see my brother and a girl that will crush him, that will utterly destroy him, but no one asked for my opinion. No Europe this summer, no brother for the duration of this marriage.

Instead, I look forward, to the day after the wedding, when Darren will leap from his crappy white Oldsmobile to embrace me, and hand me soda, and settle me into his passenger's seat and look at me with those eyes the impossible color of tree pulp and say, What now? A lot has passed between this boy and I in the twenty years we've been around, but I can rely on him to show up at my house and load me into his car and take me anywhere as long as it's away. Because he has the dust of the place, too. We'll drive out to the mesa and for a long time, he'll just watch me out of the corner of his eye as my fingers run along the mala beads around my neck. He knows I'm not really Buddhist, but he knows that any repetitive motion can calm the anxiety that stirs in my heart like a sickness. So he'll just watch me, until he can tell by the curve of my lips that it's time to talk. And then he'll listen as I prattle about my brother and his new bride and he'll ask if it's strange to think about him having sex and I'll just brush that off as if I haven't considered it.

And then he'll park and we'll walk up the path, my arm looped through his because he knows he can protect me in this small way, and stand at the base of the mesa and stare up at it and we will feel the tug of the dust in our bodies. We may be anglos, but the land has swallowed us up, reclaimed us, and though we are not Navajo, we are something close, and so we will not feel the nagging regret of blasphemy when we reach out and press our hands into the black stones.

He will look down at me and ask about university and I'll say it's fine, and he'll say the same, because that's the lie we tell ourselves, too, and this isn't university, this is our homeland. School belongs at school, and we belong here.

But that all is more than thirty-six hours away, and I know that because I've calculated it, and divided up the hours. This hour, wait for the plane. Next hour, fly home, stand on the terra cotta tiles of the International Sunport, waiting for some visage of traditional family to pick me up. Third hour, drive home. Hours and hours of preparation, pictures, scrutiny and disapproving looks, not sleeping enough.

And then Darren and the mesa.

But right now, just waiting. Just hanging here in limbo.