

*The Problem with Solitaire
(Is That It Can Be Hard to Tell
If You're Playing Yourself)*



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THE PROBLEM WITH SOLITAIRE
(IS THAT IT CAN BE HARD TO TELL
IF YOU’RE PLAYING YOURSELF)



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I AM WORRIED THAT THE ANSWERS I WAS BORN WITH
HAVE LONG SINCE RUBBED AWAY

If there is a new place on this body—
an undiscovered patch of skin concealed

somewhere on my surface, as yet unhandled
—I would like it to show itself now.

I've turned keys under my tongue and combed my scalp
for passageways. I wrote *OPEN SESAME* on the mirror,
tried unfamiliar trips hoping to scrape a knee I never had,
but all I've done is scour the familiar sore.

Maybe this place waits like Brigadoon
—emerges from my mist

once every hundred years—
hoping no hunters stumble past.

Maybe there's a spell I have to say perfectly
to make it appear. Maybe this is it: the plea

that will produce the kept secret, the wardrobe
my questions can climb through to the hidden realm

where I am complete as a snowfall
that no one has yet woken up under.

WHO KNOWS WHAT HE THINKS OF ME NOW?

A calendula petal unfurling in acid. The bite taken out of Bikini Atoll.
Some spider who built her web across the doorway of his memoir, maybe

a velvet box with a snap-up lid, corners worn naked in his pocket.
In that rounded room, small as an apology tucked among roses, I must wait

as he remembers: a silhouette against the headboard
eating underdone crumb cake with my glasses off,

short-sighted like he liked me, the light having to slide through
his blinds to find my hair pinned, in magnificent spirals to the wall.

I was supposed to be a suitcase large enough for a long journey,
full of clothes that show—wherever the whistle blows—who he believes

himself to be. Is this how I go missing from my own portrait?
Become a vanished lump of sugar that makes his coffee

the way he doesn't drink it? The once-favourite cufflink
resented for letting go, responsible for having been lost?

I make it my work to recall him as he was:
outlined in reasons to leave, his hands up my skirt,
against the car, his own name pouring from his mouth.

WHAT I TOOK FROM MY MOTHER

A name: my second middle, or my first last.

A distaste for underwires and a light
blue bra, when she was done with it.

The habit of arranging small objects
into altars, readying every room
for an offering.

A long-necked ease with earrings.

A list of Nevers:

let your host do the dishes.
forget to write a thank you note.
use soap on the wooden bowl
or metal on the Teflon.
stay with a man who hits you
no matter if your best necklace is on the nightstand.
no matter if every coat you own is hung in his closet.
no matter what he says, it will never only happen once.

Bad vision, swimming lessons.

Her youngest daughter.

I'm sorry. I meant to be more careful,
but left too many pieces of that girl
in places I'd been warned not to return to.

THE PROBLEM WITH SUBJECT–OBJECT DISAGREEMENT

I am cranky at the Musée d'Orsay.

Just half an hour in,
already sick of regarding
my own image, framed and lit,
or in cases of museum glass
designed to minimize reflection.

The café coffee is bullshit
in both quality and cost
and my back hurts, my hips
are cramped, uterus sore.

I had an IUD implanted yesterday,
a special kind that isn't approved back home.

When I got up to dress
in the gyno's small office,
I'd left fresh strokes of blood
across the end of the doctor's table:
a composition we have made
—or have been made to make—
since doctors, since tables, began.

In the Musée's downstairs bathroom,
I change my pad, wash my hands,
meet my own glare in the mirror.
On impulse, lift my shirt.
Under it, a thousand years
of stone and oil paint arranged
in the arcs with which men
like to tell their myths,
express their gifts.

I leave before getting my money's worth,
walk through the museum shop
without buying a postcard
or any other reproduction
of some overpriced object.

FIGURING OUT, IN RETROSPECT,
HOW MANY TIMES IT MIGHT HAVE COUNTED

When I said *I don't want to*
and he heard *try to make me*

he put his fingers in
and noted
that my head tilted
back
and stomach rose
mouth began to open

so he pointed out
I was being a hypocrite
a reasoning that seemed
unassailable.

I didn't downplay it
later
didn't think
to mention it at all

already open jeans
the couch
his logic

already folded
into how I thought
this was all supposed to go.