

HOUSESITTER

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Ten, nine, eight... Blinking numbers shrink behind your head ... seven, six, five... We're still here at the crosswalk, even though it's been minutes since my "bye," and your "see you soon." Only then, you asked me about that book I mentioned, and niceties returned us to a familiar loop. It's funny how that happens, how long you can spend talking without saying anything. But listen, I'm glad we're still here because there's something I wanted to tell you. I should've said it earlier, like when your knee touched mine and suddenly we were sitting on the floor of an empty apartment. The party was ending. Everyone had gone upstairs, or downstairs. Maybe they left. It didn't matter. We had crowded ourselves together onto a throw pillow in the glow of a paper lamp. Touching felt more important than words, though we still needed some, like when you ran your finger down the line of my jaw saying, "can you stay here with me?" And I thought you'd say it again, only you ate a french fry and then I did too. We were back sitting at a too-bright bar on stools that felt so rigid and now, we're here at the crosswalk where maybe minutes or years ago you said, "well I should go this way", already knowing I shouldn't. Because each time we meet, I'm back at that apartment, that party, worrying that there's something I left there. So what I was thinking was that instead of saying bye it should be goodbye. I hope that doesn't sound too harsh. After all, it'd just be for a little bit, another minute or month or decade. It'd be nice if there was another word to say it. I've spent so much time learning to be nice, it'd be a shame to stop now when I've just become so good at it. Wait, the crosswalk says as the light's returned to a red hand, and all I can think about is all the words we've said before. I can barely see you through the stack piled between us, a crowded box on the concrete. Things we traded back and forth that made me, or more likely us, think it might end differently. And well, we're still standing here and I'm thinking it'd be yet another shame to leave them here. We don't know what the weather will bring, or what they'd look like wet. And anyway it's possible we could dust them off. Some might still be good. Like that time I apologized that I couldn't get hard - you looked me in the eye to say "it's ok," and discomfort melted. Suddenly we were smiling naked in bed, the blue glow of the moon matching the light of my phone as we watched a video of a raccoon eating berries. Who knows now how many times the numbers have come and gone, or whether or not we fully tuned out the automated speaker as it announced "WALK." But hey, this might sound crazy. Should we go back to that party? It's probably over by now. But I'm thinking the people might not be back from upstairs, or downstairs, or wherever it was they went. We won't stay long, just check to make sure we took all the things we were meant to. We'll be housesitters, waiting for the right people to come back, or show up, or for everything to end up how it should have. The numbers blink again. Four, three, two... And betrayed by all those other times I've had a conversation, the words "you should get going before the light changes," slip out even if I didn't mean them too. It's too late for corrections, because you've already said "bye." One... And watching you cross the street, I say "see you soon."