

## ***Citrus***

*By Hannah Honey*

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The first thing I notice when I wake up is how light it is.

We were in such a rush last night to take off our clothes and be touching again that we didn't think to shut the blinds. Now, the room is so bright it's as if we have shrunk to the size of dust particles and are bathing inside of a lightbulb.

For the first time in months, I'm waking up in a bed that isn't mine, and I'm not alone. I'm cupped in the palms of a sleeping man like a baby bird, my feathers tickling the soft skin of his hard chest. I am awake, but I do not move. I don't even twitch, don't even scratch the itch on my thigh or move the stray strand of hair that sticks to my sweaty forehead. Maybe it's because his hands are so warm. Maybe it's because I feel so safe.

I trace the length of my name along his forearm, perhaps half-consciously aware of how easily he could have forgotten it. Only now do I move, as he gently turns me over so that my cheek is settled against his chest, my arm thrown lazily across his stomach.

These are the mornings made for old-timey jazz music, for slowness, for staying in bed. I watch with tender fascination as his lips twitch subtly apart and together again, preparing for vowels which never arrive, until finally his hesitant, half-expressed thoughts tumble out like eggshells.

'I like you.' He says, softly. 'I like having you here.'

'I like you and I like being here.' I reply. 'I could spend all day in bed with you.'

And we both mean exactly what we are saying.

There's something about lying in bed with someone that makes you say things you never usually would. I noticed this last night, the extent to which he managed to prise me open like a jam jar: slowly, gently, then suddenly all at once, my sticky thoughts coating his absorbent

silence. I noticed that I was speaking much more than he was. And I noticed that he didn't seem to want me to stop.

I'm not used to this, and he can tell. So the first time he touches me, I harden like an orange peel, and shrink into the positions in which men seem to like me most. I do what I presume he expects, I open myself up to be hurriedly desegmented. But he doesn't grab me, doesn't dissect me, doesn't pull me apart to devour my flesh. He strokes my forearms and plays with my hair, sipping me slowly like a sweet wine. He doesn't rip my clothes off in rough, careless motions. He peels them from me like I am origami and he's unfolding my creases to better understand my blueprint. He doesn't turn me over, pin me down, fuck me like an animal. He looks into my eyes as if vision is rationed and he's saved his up just to spend it all now.

'Tell me what you want.' he says. 'Show me how you like it.' He kisses my neck and caresses my thigh and I try to remember if we really have only met twice, or if he's always been here and I'm only just noticing.

I had a co-worker who told me on a particularly quiet shift about the invisible string theory. We sat behind the empty bar flipping soggy beer mats as she explained how some people are always circling around your life, waiting for the right moment to enter it. She calls it a string but I imagine a bungee cord - something tighter, thicker. Something with the force to not just keep you connected, but to keep pulling you back.

All he wants to do is make me feel good, and all I want to do is let him, so we become an entanglement of fingers and hands and symbiotic breath. I am kissing his neck, he is easing my thighs apart, I am moaning his name, he is telling me how good I sound. Everything he says is sugar and I am craving every grain that is his to give, tasting each sweet syllable as I swallow his lexicon into my belly.

But now, it is the morning. His bedroom is a sea of light and we are floating in the aftershock of the evening, savouring our final hour of play-pretend, touching, laughing, acting as if this isn't all a little sad. Because we're both aware that soon I will leave, and we'll have to pretend that this all meant half of what it did because that's what 'casual' is, and 'casual' is the best we both have to give. Casual intimacy. Temporary adoration. For twelve hours, we were in love. For twelve more, we'll remain in a synthetic bubble of infatuation. But by the day after tomorrow, he will probably think of me twice: once when he smells my shampoo on his pillowcases, a second when he throws them both into the wash.

He offers to make me a cup of tea but considering I might never see him again, I can't stand the thought of being apart that long. Instead, I swallow every second that we sit arm to arm in a knowing kind of quiet as our breathing settles into a synchronicity reserved for people whose minds won't admit what their bodies already know. All I want is for him to fall in love with me. The last thing I want is for him to be in love with me. I think we could make each other happy if only we were ready to be, but it's clear that we're not, and so breathing together for five minutes more is the most together we can be.

Outside of his window, the gentle sun is coaxing his neighbours out of their houses like tiny ants, topless, laughing, all turning pink like newborns. I am content as I leave him for the colony. I am glad that I exist.