

YOU

By

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i. now

This is not the way we want to live, you and I. Headaches blasting in at dawn, an overactive jaw grinding your teeth into shrapnel. The accumulation of months of worry about money, the state of the world, my love, what your parents will say. All of it unyielding like a bandage around your torso, until you wake, whimpering, because you cannot breathe.

You cannot move.

This is not the way we want to live, you and I.

ii. death

Your grandmother is dying and no one called to tell you. Your mother is losing all her sleep in the hospital, crouched by her mother's bedside.

Things are really bad here, your father says.

How bad, you ask.

Very bad, he replies.

But that's all he will say. That's all he's ever said.

You tell him you are getting married, but that doesn't seem to matter to him either.

Okay, he says flatly. Do what's best.

When you hang up, I look at you, really look at you; how far you have come.

I don't mean the thousands of miles from that distant and foreign hemisphere, not that, no.

It is lovingness.

iii. then

You've seen your grandmother fall when you were a small boy playing in the garden, this woman who raised you. She washed the clothes in a large metal tub in the front yard, the streets were dusty, the dogs loud. You looked up to see her disappearing into the water. You screamed, and you screamed again, and she didn't rise.

What other things have you never told me?

iv. later

Your father used to hit you. And your grandfather.

Whack.

Did your parents love you? You don't know.

You cry now.

Only when you were good.

Maybe.

Friedman/You/3

v. now

You reach for me, as you do every night against the cold. You are so hungry for my love, solitary bird that you are, nesting in your corner whenever you can.

You.

Come here.

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