

The Tellings

I tell her I will. I tell her I owe her one.

“Thank you,” she tells me back. “You are sure you want to do this.”

“Yes,” I tell her. “Of course I want to do this. I ruined your bingo night.”

“This isn’t bingo this time,” she tells me. “This is a date.”

“This is fine,” I tell her. “I owe you one.”

“You can be here by eight,” she tells me.

“Sure,” I tell her.

“You are sure this is all right,” she tells me.

“Yes,” I tell her. “I am sure this is all right.”

“All right,” she tells me. “He’ll pick me up after eight. When we get back, I’ll tell him to wait in the car until you’re gone.”

“You don’t have to tell him that,” I tell her. “I told you—I am not bothered by this. At all.”

•

I hear myself suck in my breath as I awaken on the sofa.

“We’re back,” she tells me. “Now you have to leave.”

“I have to put on my shoes,” I tell her.

“Hello,” the man tells no one. “Is the baby asleep?”

I put on my shoes.

•

Now I take off my shoes. I sit with a small paper bag in my lap. From it, I eat cookies—chocolate chip, with nuts. These are my comfort foods. A woman’s voice came out of my radio, telling me about it:

“Comfort foods,” this woman’s voice told everyone, “are the foods we feed ourselves to make up for the final time we were pulled from the tit, each of our tiny, sucking mouths pulled away with a tiny, wet pop.”

It was public radio.

•

I will bet they are in bed by now. Some of this I can picture in my head. I can hear some of what she must be telling him.

•

I am in my room. It is dark.

My old mattress, giving off its old mattress smell, holds my old pillow, my old blanket, and my old sheet. I sit among these old things.

There are sweet, crumbly crumbs on my sheet. I can bend over and lick them up.

I can lay me down on my face, and writhing taste the tasteless linen of my bed. I cannot tell what may come next.