
Milan

I dropped my heavy brown backpack and changed my clothes, from one tube top to another. Drenched from the July heat, I rinse my face with cold sink water, already thinking ahead to what evening will bring. After a long day of train travel, I walked an additional hour through Milan's urban streets, saving money on cabs to compensate for my concert ticket. I menageried tangential to Milan's central downtown spiral, headed through Chinatown, arriving finally at my hostel. With no time to waste, I throw the essentials in my fanny pack. I take ten deep breaths and arrive in Milan— already late.

Olga

I walked quickly along the outer perimeter of a drudgy park. Little soda cans, one coca-cola and one lemon fanta, are pushed into my hands. I crack open the former, stealthily downing two large pill capsules filled with magic mushrooms as I approach the pit entrance, preemptively clearing myself for security.

“Hey, is it alright if I join you?” Asks the girl who suddenly appeared on my left. Happy to be accompanied, I breathe a sigh of relief. I quicken to keep up with her long strides. She asks if I have a cigarette. I offer her the lemon fanta from my fanny pack.

She is my age, a model, who moved here from Poland— bags under her eyes from nightlife obligations and work travels between Milan and Rome. She says her family sucks and there's no reason to stay in Poland— Her silver linings tie bows with

my gold thread, twisted fortune. Red scabby dots cover her arms. An allergic reaction to her moldy apartment, assigned to her by her agent. Gucci gave her time off to recover— she says the industry is toxic. In her newfound hours she had serendipitously bought a ticket to see our favorite band. She says good art is interesting foremost. Her stride has unmatched confidence, witty and sarcastic. She thinks I live in Milan too and can't wait to be friends. Colors grow brighter as joy bubbles in my chest, leaking out in giggles, happy to have a companion.

They make us separate at the security checkpoint. I tighten and shrink, stuck on a stranger as I dive into intuition and out of rationality, getting higher. Everyone around me is speaking in Italian. It's a loud jumble. I'm not sure what line to enter. Will they touch me? How do I scan my ticket? Everyone around me is smiling so I smile too. I try not to trip over my feet or knock anything over. I clumsily squeeze past a frustrated woman, her purse contents splayed along a small table, catching bits of her tension like flies in Summer sweat. I want to be invisible— dead one day soon enough.

Connected by fortune, we drift back together before entering the pit. Olga and I found a spot to sit along the upper periphery, in the open grass to the left of the front runners. People are sprawled around us. The sea of blankets laid in the dry Summer grass grows increasingly sparse further from the stage. In the blazing early sunset, hot with many hours to go, I sit on her left side to stay in her shadow. Bass reverberates into the ground and then rises up through the legs of the dancing crowd. I lean my head on her shoulder as we swim through each other's secrets, yelling over music words normally whispered. She tells me I am very beautiful. I take off my shoes and roll in the grass, almost green and wet with life, as I return the compliment.

Having grown thirsty, we join the mob pushing forward at the bar, and dive into each other deeper amidst a clammy line of customers. What do I want to drink? Pressed up against the counter, we pulse into each other impatiently, with reckless drive and clamped sweat, unruly fervor— my smiling dilated pupils peer sideways over cat eye sunglasses. Reality shifts around me— we order two aperol spritzes. A prayer of gratitude to the gods who delivered my Scorpionic friend, magnetized into fate. She's full of free will and half-functional overpowered charm. As she unties her gray-blue cardigan from her waist, puts it on to cover her scabby arms, she smirks and says *"Watch this."*

"Do you have a cigarette?" She asks the bartender, piercing his eyes with hers. Underlying powers, her intense subtleties knead sultry strength, a female gaze that lets the word leak between her cupped palms, cracked open. Anything is possible. I want a cigarette. Maybe I want to kiss her right after she smokes one.

His lips press together, chin tilted down as he leans across the bar. *"Listen. I am working now, but if you meet me back here later I will have a cigarette for you. And more."*

She pauses— glancing at him down then up. *"I want a beer."*

We head into the crowd with three free drinks, shoving past tightly packed frowns, sweaty shoulders starting to sunburn, still two hours before for the main act. She carves a narrow, winding path. Turning back to me, she smiles, a smirking tease, and says that she won't go find that man later tonight.

We make our way towards the front of the crowd, where we can see the musicians, packed between thousands of fans. I put on her cardigan to block the sun. We dance until we're tired, then she asks a group nearby for a cigarette, clamoring with the desperation of a thousand lives come and gone, secrets dance in smoke.

Our hands touch– I offer to teach her a telepathy game: “*I will think of a shape that’s a color, for example a green triangle, and send it to you, and you guess. Then it’s your turn– you send me one, and so on.*” We get almost each one right, sensitive and attuned.

Twenty minutes leading up to the main act now– she buys us two beers from one of the employees who weaves through the crowd carrying giant carts of icy alcohol on their heads. To save our energy, we sat on the littered grass, amongst the crowd– we dodged dancing shoes, packed between their legs and relished the relative quiet. In huddled whispers, we parsed through seas of bad men we’ve met, the true problems of art. Casual and flippant, in flow with chance, we confess half-remembered traumas in insignificant secrecy, sworn unsaid between us two amidst tens of thousands.

The full moon in Capricorn rose like a balloon behind us as the concert finally began. I looked back to watch it rise, seeing her smile. We sing louder, dance closer, crowd packed shoulder to shoulder. Yellow halo peeking behind, I fantasize. We are amidst the best waves, perfect performance seeps into us as refractive, memoric light, a well of joy abundant forever. I took off my shoes, tucked them into my fanny pack and planted my feet firmly down on the matted, browned grass, receiving.