

In Libris

Today, I just want to be with a book that smells of wood ash and lays a spindle bed with a fraying quilt. I'd like it the color of 4 o'clock on eggshells with the rattle of a tin pail.

I want a gray rain on new hay and cracked leather boots beneath my homespun dress. I want to feel rustic, country Irish when I read it, so that when I pause for a cup of tea I scuff across a floor of rough-hewn boards, a day's work settling to the cracks.

As I fetch the teacup from the cupboard, to feel it fine against my farm-worked hand, see bard rock hens and thatch through panes above the tap; an easing into gloaming.

Tonight, I want to feel coquette in carmine drapes and velvet chairs and piano notes while I read, touch gleaming lacquer and burnished brass when I rest the book to cross a swank speakeasy for a glass of wine, cigarette between my fingers as I cork the bottle, cuff of gems on my wrist.

My satin hem to brush lightly the Bokhara as I slip back to the story, wine on my lips, breasts draped in music. I want the lamplight of the book to be low, its voice coy and purring, a glamour in the wave of its hair.

I want bourbon between its pages, a sax in both our souls, the seduction of an evening in red.

Late some evenings, I want another chance to read the book I fear has made me miss out on my soul mate. On some hushed redeye flight, to choose, instead of sleep, to press the overhead light and pull out the book that intrigues my special person seated by fate across the aisle, in line to see its cover.

The book that prompts an exchange to last the hours until landing and beyond, through years of brainy urban bliss. The one read from at our wedding, kept as sacred, passed on to our child at graduation. A Russian novel, I think, or classic on free will.

The one that must be in my bookcase still, moved half a dozen times and still unread, unseen tie to my true love out there, but chosen over sleep this time.

In plucky times, I want to read myself in some vintage tale, a boy with a Roy Rogers slingshot and a secret, private place. I want my knees roughed and dirty as I crouch to pull the splintered panel from the back of a locked and long-abandoned shed, crawl in behind the flaking paint and KEEP OUT sign to my milk crate stool and magazine of dirty pictures.

I want to feel the naughty stir my mother doesn't know and wouldn't like as I wear the pages even thinner with sweaty hands, a heat my own and magic. To see the ladies on the pages of my Playboy happy still to be there, blissed and sleepy as they lay out again my education.

I want that gas station grease monkey with his pin-up calendar to have nothing on me as I study every curve and trace each shadowed crease, my Buster Browns digging angels in the dirt floor like snow.

One day, I want to read the book about the baker that I never wrote. Feel myself inside her body, apron tied across my sturdy middle, strands of red hair escaping my cap. As avatar for all my deepest thoughts, by hand each night she kneads her heart and mind into the loaves. Her story, my life, conveyed in concert with the yeast, flour and hearth, to the pilgrims who come, take the bread.

The bread filled with math and music, theories on houses and fungus, healing of hurts and history. All the mix and rise of every close-held observation, every special insight given me and never followed through. And at the end, this book collecting all the ruminations of all her nights so I can read them start to finish, without a fear of failing.

I want to make it up to her, my imagined heroine: to find I've made her book on some brave plane parallel to this. Warm as her work, dusty with flour, its cover crusted with shags of dough and with all my share of guts and love inside. The book as her body, her body as mine, mine as the bread, in offering for being alive.

Often set down, I see myself in a dress of curling purple lichen and want my sphagnum hair to tangle with the title in the bark of a book I root from dense sedge at the marsh. I want to feel the muck sponge through my toes as I hold the volume heavy in my hands, steam rising from my shoulder blades, attuned as a deer.

To feel my limbs like supple saplings bend with the breeze made by pages of story as they flutter and turn from the spine, read the sheets like palms and know great things through their lines. Goose bumps on my skin like lenticels in birch, open to breathe it all in.

I want the pebbles on my tongue to cobble the words and a blade of salt hay to hold my place as I take a drink from the stream.

At last, coptic bound, soft goatskin on papyrus, I want a final book to find me in a dim and musty pawn shop off an ancient market square. In the far back corner a blessed book with quires of my name repeated in the ink of another language, telling my place in some tangential history more crucial than this.

Illuminated parchment gilded in a reverence I may not deserve will stitch me to before and yet-to-come in a treatise on all I never dared to ask yet somehow did, and in this tome embossed with my initials I will know my contents to be brighter than I ever felt them before.