

His worst memories of their time together are those few, frantic weeks in the hospital, wondering Is she going to be alright, Is she going to be alright, through a numbness like ether. Sometimes, he would try to remember the last words that he had said to her, trying to summon up guilt, maybe. If they hadn't been kind enough or memorable enough or intelligent enough, he would have gone into the hospital room between surgeries to say something better to her still face. But there was a hole there, in those last few moments; he hoped that he had said "I love you", but knew that it wouldn't have mattered.

Sometimes, he would fall asleep in a chair by her bed, and later find her unchanged, unmoving, and he would be terrified that she had woken up and he had not been there for her. He wanted to bring her flowers, so that if she did open her eyes and he wasn't there, she would know - what? That he had been there, memorized her unconscious form through careful, lengthy study? Watched liquids and gases trickle out of her body, almost sweetly? Fallen asleep himself counting her angry heartbeats on the monitor?

Sometimes, he would realize that he didn't know small, simple things about her, like what flowers she liked, and whether she knew how to roller-blade. He would go out - Selfish, selfish! he would tell himself, and come running back in, convinced that she would be there waiting for him, sitting up in bed looking lonely, as she sometimes did in the middle of the night when she had had a dream that she couldn't remember.

His best memories of their time together are the days that they spent at the copier place, where she worked part-time in the evenings. During the week, customers came in so rarely that they would make out in the back-room, heady from the dizzying smell of toner. He had always tried to convince her, laughingly, to make love on one of the photocopiers. She would just give him some witty reply that made him desperate, all of a sudden, to have her on the floor or on the desk or on the wall, pressed between the stacks of manila.

Once, he pushed against her too hard and millions of sheets of paper came fluttering down around them like butterflies, perfectly pressed and bleached white. Afterwards, they would lie against one another - sometimes, she would laugh, gently, as though she were relieved of some burden, some unease that had been clutching at her.

Once or twice, they spoke in hushed voices about traveling. They could never agree on a destination: he wanted to go to South America (secretly convinced that it would be like all of those old movies about going to romantic Brazilian cities and dancing deliriously through the night). She wanted to go to Europe, insisting that she had family in various European countrysides who would put them up. He didn't want to meet her family, and when he told her as much, she sighed resignedly. She often told him that she didn't want to die here, and he would try to hush her wordlessly, taking her hand under the counter.

He finds it strange that he seems to have no memories of the times in between, when they were neither broken nor ecstatic, when they just were. Simply alive, but alive together. How, then, can he say that their relationship was a failure or a success, now that she has decided to give up on it (a failure to her, he supposes)? How can he decide whether to mourn or to feel freed?

The last memory of her that he has is of meeting her eyes through the window of the truck she brought to empty the apartment. He had already moved out, but he wanted to be there in case she needed help (maybe, also, in case she changed her mind). She had looked at him almost pityingly, and he should have been angry. But she broke their gaze after an instant and drove away, and he thought it might have been sort of pathetic to be angry alone.