

Evaporate

I remember what you told me as you poured the tea. That the tea would stay hotter for longer if you added milk. Something to do with the sudden drop in temperature changing the rate at which liquid cooled.

Because everything wants to be at room temperature you said, and the hotter or colder something is, the quicker it wants to get there.

This has stayed with me always. Not the physics of it – I actually don't even know if it's true. What stays with me is the way you looked when you told me. You spoke of the hot tea's quest for coolness wearing a look of totally puzzled pride. Of actual bafflement. It was as if the tea on the counter before you were engaged in some remarkable, heroic, and ultimately senseless act. Because why would anyone, anything, rush so recklessly toward coolness? How could such beautiful heat be so hastily abandoned?

Add milk then I said. Knowing you too well, teasing. And true to form you pinched your nose, high on the bridge, in that way that meant *I'm tired* or *I'm anxious* or *my nose is bleeding* and yet which meant, on this occasion, *oh give me patience, Christ, as I suffer such a fool.*

That's not the point you finally said. *To put in milk would be cheating. Choosing.*

Cheating and choosing are not the same thing I said. And I remember at this point I had my arms around you; I could smell your smell through the fug of Earl Grey. And I remember I was no longer teasing. I knew you too well. The conversation was silly and inane and I had no idea what you were talking about, but you were solemn and serious and open to hurt. About the tea. Or about something not the tea, something else. I don't know. Perhaps the tea was a metaphor. I don't know. I don't remember if you told me. All I remember is pulling you closer to me, feeling your

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heat, your seemingly unquenchable and wholly comforting heat, and standing there with you in silence as we so often did, in the comfort of heat and love and silence, of things unspoken, of things that did not need to be said.

I remember all of this now in the kitchen, alone. There is so much I wish to share with you. Half-remembered jokes, or opportunities for jokes. And if I dare extend the metaphor I've never been sure existed, I feel that these memories are the milk in my tea. They slow my cooling; they retain your heat. I sit in the discomfort of heat and grief and silence and I hold you to me still. I feel the pulse in your neck against my cheek. We are there, together, still.

Something else: I do not remember drinking the tea you'd made that day. When I did, if I did, I have no doubt it had gone stone cold.