



The Small Intimacies We Share

BY SHELBY NEWSOME

I remember the moment I thought my ex might first try to kiss me. We were standing awkwardly in my apartment at the end of the night—before we started dating, before we were a thing that could be broken. He had followed me up to my apartment because I told him that he should borrow my favorite book, *Dandelion Wine* by Ray Bradbury.

My apartment, a tiny space that felt larger than what it actually was, with its towering ceilings and creamy yellow walls, swayed with me as I sashayed through the room, unable to stand still in front of this man. I skirted away from him, an anxious bundle, swapped the book from my bookcase, and handed it to him. At that moment, I couldn't tell if he wanted to kiss me and I knew I wasn't ready for him to try so I continued my movement until he left. But the excitement of it all was intoxicating.

The two of us in my apartment—wholly isolated from the world—was like a palpable swelling, a small intimacy we shared.

Once he left, the swelling deflated and I was by myself with my mind replaying the night.

That was over two years ago—what feels like a different lifetime. Now, I am in my childhood home, spending the COVID-19 quarantine with my parents, before I move to a different state later this year.

I am isolated, just as I was in that moment with my ex, but now, it's in a different way. One where I am learning to find intimacy within the moments I spend by myself.

The swelling shifted; it's no longer the world expanding in front of me as time stands still. It's instead inside of me, an implosion akin to Violet bulging into a gigantic blueberry in *Willy Wonka & the Chocolate Factory*. As someone who constantly seeks solace from my vices, I didn't know how to respond to this swelling—whether my insides would bruise or my body would conflate with the space surrounding me. I thought I very well may combust and that would be the end of me.

Being forced to slow down and be with myself was difficult—and still is. I'm learning to be kind to myself, to trust my instinct, to push past the fears circling in my mind like a tornado. I'm learning that it's okay to be by myself and that it's okay to rest.

But I miss the external swelling of emotions—a moment shared with someone else, like a secret only the two of us are in on. Before quarantine was even a remote possibility for the future, I had mentioned to a friend that I thought her one friend, who I've met a few times, was cute. She was excited to be able to play matchmaker.

I can't resist daydreaming about what would have happened if we were set up, if we were able to get the chance to meet before I move nine hours away. Would we have had a moment so full of just us that it felt like we were the only two people twisting through this universe?

I may not get that experience any time soon. But I am grateful for having the privilege to use this isolation as a time to unpack the pieces of who I am, dust them off, and figure out how they work again. While at first I felt like Violet, completely swollen in the worst possible way, I'm starting to feel like the world is expanding as I twist through the universe—even if I'm all by myself.