

y o u r a b

s e n c e

i s l i k e

a d r u g

f o r m e

Having touched the hand of a cashier.

Having brushed against a leg while taking a seat.

Having overheard and blushed.

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*Vertigo as a symptom of profound attraction.
An excess of desire.*

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Coffee beans, cat fur, the bagels left out,
behind, to dry.

Things you touched today that were not
yourself.

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Lift arms over head and flash of orange hair.
Armpit, belly, flashes of memory.

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The microbiome. You've sucked everything
you've ever lived with. And swallowed.

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Half-awake in a moving vehicle, eyes open,
black through windows. Vacuum. Speed.
Vertigo.

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An elaborate game of look-look away-look-look away.

It lasts forever.

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D says he wishes things were such that if one were in the supermarket and saw someone attractive one might just fall into each other's arms.

John Humphrey Noyes repeatedly writes that sex in the Oneida Community would be "like a handshake."

S.F. says: [primary narcissism]

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Rush hour train. Wedged between larger people. Stomach-to-ass with a round man, pushing. A ridiculously ripe, inappropriate Venus. You can't stand him. You are inseparable.

All else is elbows, everywhere.

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Then *Les Salauds*. Right then and there on the way down you open his shirt, his surprise, his thin torso.

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Yes, it is true that sometimes touch goes wrong.

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In the midst of everything suddenly awake.
Other bodies have intruded on your body.
Bumps in the dark: an elbow, a knee, soft
tissue, unknown.

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Accidentally eating your own hair.

Others.

The cab ride after the brief encounter.

Stickiness from fruit.

Stickiness from sick.

Stickiness from glue.

Falling asleep on the train.

Waking to find someone watching.

Waking to find no one watching.

Cotton mouth.

The loss of the first tooth.

It still hurts.

Creep.

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You watch the woman eat a burger on the train. Wax paper, slime of pickles, onions you imagine in the air.

Ketchup pools on her lip. She licks.

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Turn left. And left again. And left again. And left again. At each turn there is someone else's breath. You are held in a circle between warm and stale. There is no real way to feel about this. Turn left again.

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In line, the person behind you interacts with the cashier. On screen, a hug is more like an attack, two bodies clapping together.

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Metrocard into turnstile slot. Wallet into snug backpack pocket. Skin oils into touchscreen smartphone. Vegetables into mouth.

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The moments of falling briefly and profoundly in love that are *eyes only*. The kind of love that comes from vision. How it drips. How it is all wax and no wane.

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What is the possibility that we were all always like this here? What is the chance that you will be lost? You are unmoored, you have loosed me. What you will know is everything, all that overwhelms.

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Having been greeted enthusiastically by old men. A wide, gap-toothed smile. A thump on the back.

Besides this the day is no different than any other. This is everything. It will happen again and again.

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A group of tourists speaking their language, eating, joking, sit down for a moment around a young man. He smiles and laughs along with them.

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Leaning against a warm brick building while he cradles shiny handlebars. Sun. A brief conversation leading to an invitation to soup.

Weeks later, he arrives. Sober, awkward, “is this a date?,” fingers drumming the table. The sun was gone and still has not returned.

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An acquaintance recounts the details of an occurrence outside your shared social field without pause.

There is nothing for you to say or do.

You hover in the wake of this nakedness.

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Homeless man pissing. Two young men
reeking of pot, acne, red eyes, excessive
blinking, gentle speech, quiet laughter.

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Hold still.

Two things will happen.

Someone will blow on your ear. Softly.

Wait for it.

The right tone will come.

You will know it as the feeling of a hand on your hair.

Wait for it.

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In text and soon after in person. When he arrives late with circles under his arms, shirt clinging to his back, all night seems to be touching his neck and manubrium.

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*There's no lack of people to satisfy the mind
But nowhere is there a body with such an odor*

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