

ELASTICITY

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To the woman reading *Men are From Mars, Women are from Venus*, while walking around the lake this cold October morning: the answers aren't in there, or in the pages of any other book catalogued "self-help." That's a marketing scam meant for women like you, women who believe throwing crisp bills at problems will make them disappear and if there aren't crisp bills, then ones so worn their wrinkles aren't even visible, the way we all might be some day if life grants us that, the way my grandmother's skin worn rough by alcoholism and tobacco was baby soft again by the time she died, the elasticity gone. Elasticity, the ability to stretch and bounce back. You might wonder who am I to talk, with my headphones in and hands shoved deep in the pockets of my coral-colored coat, a beacon among the grays and browns and blacks, wanting to be noticed, wanting to stay invisible, dropping my eyes when a stranger says hello. He wears flannel and jeans and has black Xs tatted on the backs of his hands. *Hello*, I say, barely more than a puff of steam, and he smiles and asks if he can pet my dog, and what's there to do but say yes, or no, and I choose yes because there's no risk in saying no, and with all the packs of jumpsuits and baby joggers, there's no risk in saying yes, and because what I want more than anything is the *blipblipblip* of someone on my radar, or to be on someone's radar, to connect. The stranger's hands massage my dog's ears and my dog wags her tail and leans against his legs coating them with long white

hairs, and our breath converges, and the lake patrol is just starting their boat, the engine revving, and maybe men are from Mars and women are from Venus, but we've been on Earth long enough that we should stop reading books to understand each other, and just actually talk to each other, maybe about being straight-edge, or from Iowa and vegan, the silent conversation of two bodies walking in tandem who don't know each other but know this is a moment that's supposed to stretch, or how we ended up *here* wherever *here* is, and especially if *here* is on a path around a Colorado lake, with the aspens coloring the backdrop of mountains in a Bob Ross of purple, yellow, red, and orange.

