

TO MY HUSBAND'S OLD GIRLFRIEND WHOSE PHOTOGRAPH I SLIDE INTO AN ALBUM

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You're not as pretty as I thought you'd be.

Don't get me wrong. I'm not here to insult. I'm just here to tell the truth, and the truth is your ugliness is a matter of my own insecurities more than your shortcomings. See, I thought I'd seen you, there in the mirror, that Valentine's Day I tried to wear a teddy. Jesus, the rolls and the folds and the creases. That cheap lace rubbed and scratched and when I practiced being seductive, it looked more like a one-person wave from one hand to the other. And I could have sworn you were there, could have sworn you were behind me, long and beautiful. Naked.

It was you who gave me the idea. You who told me to just take it off. Didn't I feel sexier without it? And of course I did. Of course I could imagine a better body when clothes weren't there to tell me otherwise. *See?* you said, right as a mother. No, right as an older, cooler girlfriend. Not my husband's but mine. You were all mine.

I think you should know he doesn't call you a girlfriend. He says instead that you were a sister of a guy he used to know. Don't misunderstand. I'm not here to cause trouble.

In the photograph, you're in your pajamas. I never imagined you as a woman who wore pajamas. An imported silk robe maybe, but not those worn-out pants. Not that thermal top. There you are, though, and your long, long hair—I got that right, at least—is in braids, and he tells me they made you tie something in them. *Bells?* he says, but he really can't remember. Whatever it was, they got you to walk around, twirling your hair, and

this is what you're doing in the picture, in your pajamas, your eyes half-closed and drunk from the camera's flash.

They shouldn't have treated you this way, like a dog doing tricks, playing at its own death.

My husband probably took this picture, but I wish it had been me. I wish I was the one behind the camera. I wouldn't have made you do anything. I would have warned you. I would have made sure your eyes were open, and if it were me doing the talking, I would say exactly who you were. I wouldn't spare his feelings. I wouldn't lie about how much I loved you.