

## Honey

The cafe smelled like fresh baked bread and cookies, and the baristas were all women with warm soft hands who called everyone—the Senator, the mother, the babies, the businessmen—Honey. So many baristas would have called you Honey, David. And swayed along with you when they played Perfume Genius during the slow hours. The day after someone called you it, the day you were absent from class, I taught about two male penguins at the Brooklyn Zoo who raised a baby named Tango and everyone wanted to know if penguins could *really* be gay, so I said anyone could be gay, including me, and some of them laughed. I said *gay* meant bundle of sticks and also Love and some of them tried to understand how it could be both, so I said words mean everything and we have to be careful, and they still didn't get it and I didn't wish, then, that I had tried so much harder to teach them. I moved to a new city and started to order apple ciders with cinnamon swizzle sticks from the bakery with the kind baristas and to drink them on a park bench and that day, *that* day, a stranger sat down on the other end of one and told me I looked busy. I was not busy, I was tired and grieving. The stranger said his name was Dustin and I said my student killed himself and a woman I didn't know said *let her be*. He didn't want to let me be. David, the women put her body between us—a body, a body, we can do everything with a body, David—and our three bodies sat together there, very much alive. I told the woman your name and she held my hand and listened to it with me, together in that little sliver of park. Strangers would have wanted to sit with you, too, David. To introduce themselves and someday read and sing you their favorite lines about love or death or oceans or loss, about horses and tomato gardens, around crows and constellations, sirens and waves. Friends would have taken you to Wendy's for French fries dipped in Frosty's, or eight hours on the long bus from Buffalo to their favorite diner in Greenpoint, the one with the best hash browns and the decent coffee out of the big tan mugs, where the cook wears a grease-smeared apron and yells out the rectangular silver window to regulars about the weather and the sports teams while he keeps an eye on the ruby-colored water glasses and the cash tips on uncleaned tables. People on the L train would have loved you, David. Would have watched you from their blue subway seats, over books they were half reading, over podcasts they were half listening to, over the shoulders of others shoulders and accidentally past their stop. And maybe New York City would have made you tired, like it makes so many gentle people tired, and you'd have moved to Southern California eventually, grown your hair long. Spent your days sticky with ocean and living, learning to surf somewhere, your pale body tan for once. You were only in the eighth grade, you were only thirteen, when all the boys were mean to you, when one and then four of them called you it, when you started to bring that word everywhere with you. I wish you had carried it like a buttercup, like a seashell, like a slice of California orange, like the relief of white linen fabric on a body in the desert, like a single snowflake from our hometown. Not that barb, that boulder, that heavy weapon that made you take yourself from yourself, from everyone, from all of this. But how could you have taken it lightly? You, sweet you. People would have called you Handsome, David, I promise. They would have called you Honey. They would have been better with you.