

A Requirement Unrequited

by Emily Townsend

*“The foundations for loneliness begins in the dreamscapes you create.
Their resemblance in reality reflects disappointments first.”*
—Claudia Rankine, *Don't Let Me Be Lonely*

Lying in bed, I felt dirty as I focused on his name in my phone, a jolt of chemistry sent through radio waves with each text. He brought the dopamine, tucked away in the shadows of my mind, back from its extended vacation. For the first time ever, I was physically attracted to someone.

But I still didn't want to have sex.¹

It was over before I realized my feelings for him. Aaron graduated this summer and moved back to Austin; I stayed in Nacogdoches to continue school. He was 100% sexual, I was 0% sexual. He enjoyed sleeping around. I enjoyed the simple thought of someone sleeping in bed with me.

When I told him I was asexual, Aaron didn't ask the stereotypical “are you sure?” It seemed that he accepted it. Not that it was a huge deal to come out as ace, but it created conflict. If I wanted to have a chance with him, I wouldn't be able to give him what he wanted. Now that he

¹ Conundrum: If (ever) I want to have sex while I'm drunk and I consent, will it not be consent when I'm sober? I'm asexual, so what if I wake up the next morning and wonder if I didn't actually want it? If I blacked out after saying yes, would I remember him entering me, groping my breasts, kissing flesh that's never been kissed? Would I feel like absolute shit, would I feel like he got away with what was left of my innocence? Would I even remember saying yes at all?

knew I didn't want sex, he would see me as a rejected idea, *don't try it with that girl, she doesn't want the same things as you.*

I was pushing for an image to be real so bad that I considered anyone to complete it, and he was the closest chance I had. My anaclitic tendency developed from a romanticized loneliness, which formed the uncontrollable need to manipulate people into playing roles for my daydreams. No one could relieve my disappointments. They couldn't see what I wanted them to do. My imagination was a cloudy snow globe and I was trapped inside, watching the ashes fall in a wistful swirl, while those outside couldn't work out how to crack the glass.

We were coworkers for two years at Kroger, a grocery store that refused to let us have fun. He talked to me first, after my third shift, and I felt an ease around him. He made the job tolerable, a distraction from stupid customers who didn't know how coupons worked. We had a game where, after he learned that I could read lips, we'd mouth dumb shit to each other during slow hours.

AARON: *I'm going to fuck you in the ass.*²

AARON: Now say it out loud.

EMILY: No!!

AARON: Are you... *blushing*?

EMILY, blushes: *...no...*

EMILY, smiles: Still not gonna say it.

Later he caught me off guard after I clocked out. I pressed my thumb into the keypad, said goodnight to everyone, glanced over at register 3, where Aaron was stationed until closing at one.

² Some people may see this as sexual harassment. I did too, just a smidge, but I was more startled at the thought that a guy would even say that to me, particularly the one I started to like. It made me feel like he considered me as more than a coworker—because this means that for maybe a decasecond, he had the exact image he suggested. Fucked up thinking, I know. Except I've gone my entire life flirtatiously unrecognized by the opposite sex,^{2a} and when someone I have slight interest in expresses a remotely correlative interest in me, my curiosity toward that person increases by volumes.

^{2a} At least, as far as I've counted. Bad attempts at flirting both ways didn't always settle in my score book.

His lips moved. “*I love you, Em Gem.*”

I grinned and called out, “Love you too, Aaron.” Sometimes I wished we went home together.

Master of None, Aziz Ansari’s comedy-drama television series, follows Dev’s ordinary life in New York City, highlighting his romantic turmoil with women. In the final episode of season 2, Dev accuses Francesca, who he’s in love with, for using him as a “distraction for a dying relationship.” Francesca, engaged to Pino, argues that she can’t drop her whole life in Italy, the pasta shop, her grandmother, her fiancé, to be with Dev after one month visiting him in New York. She leaves his apartment. Dev goes out to the bar to meet his friend Arnold.

DEV: I want to be really happy with her.

ARNOLD: Yeah, but did you really think this scenario through? I mean, what was gonna happen? She was gonna break up with Pino? Move to New York? I mean, that's so much pressure for both of you guys. I mean, she's lived in this tiny village her whole life. She's been with one dude. Your relationship probably wasn't gonna be this magical fantasy that's in your head. It was probably gonna be a shit-show.

DEV: I just thought we'd figure it out. I don't even know if it's about her. I just—I miss that feeling. When we were together doing all that stuff, I felt really connected to somebody. That felt really good. Now I just feel fucking alone.

I used Aaron as this fantasy placeholder because he was the only face I could see in my dreams. With every other crush I barely envisioned a small resemblance of their body, maybe a floating voice. To have someone thoroughly tangible in these schemes frightened and comforted me. It meant I was finally attaching myself to a person, that I could see beyond the glass I had spent so long circumvented in. Didn’t mean I had successfully slipped out with the liquid through the chink of the globe. If you’ve lived your entire life adapted to breathing underwater, once you hit air, you drown.

He wasn't perfect, of course. No one is. He did things that turned me off—didn't commit in relationships,³ made sexual comments that I didn't need to hear.⁴ He once said at dinner with a friend that "Emily and I are ravenous from all the lovemaking," which I recognized as a quote by Dwight from *The Office*. I blushed, thinking it was absurd that someone saw me in a sexual way, him especially, even if it was only meant as a joke.⁵ There was something that pulled me to him, though, and it was because he semi-romantically paid attention to me. So I marked him as a requirement unrequited: he fulfilled everything my mind cast him in, but I couldn't do the same for him. On the Purple-Red Attraction Scale, I was B0, a dark magenta, and he was E0, a dark cardinal. Blue cannot be mixed in to make me match his red. It's impossible to transform a secondary color into a primary shade.

I kept dreaming little domestic scenarios with Aaron, and I needed to stop. It wasn't fair to me or him. In public I constantly saw couples doing couple-y shit, and it annoyed me that I didn't have someone to do the same shit with. So I inserted myself and Aaron into similar situations.

EMILY and AARON are browsing through the W's in the nonfiction section in Half Price Books. AARON hands EMILY a Wallace book. She doesn't enjoy PDA, but he knows who she likes without asking,

³ Well, after his most recent breakup, which was a two-year relationship with a girl from our college, that's when he started "hoing," as he says. He fucked girls at parties, had threesomes, messed around for two weeks and then decided to cut her off if he didn't see it going into a Serious Relationship. I wouldn't be able to work with that. I needed to know he liked only me, not whoever he saw in a bar after he had downed three shots of vodka.

⁴ "I NEED to have sex tonight! I don't care who!"^{1a} ^ "I think she used her teeth during the BJ. Who the fuck uses teeth? My dick huuuurts." ^ "Do I have a hickey? Please tell me I don't have one. She was not very good."

^{1a} To which I replied, "You'll have to find someone for that. I do not volunteer."

⁵ After finding my Tumblr and combing through my #personal tag, where my self-portraits were archived, he dropped this text at 2 a.m., not exactly a booty call, but—

Aaron: that promiscuous Emily with the exposed stomach and boy shorts can get it 

Emily: oh lawd

Emily: those pics are so old

Emily: like 2015

Aaron: She could GET IT

Emily: except SHE HASNT

so she kisses him, a fragment of her affection.

At Target, AARON and EMILY are shopping for Christmas presents. Even though Christmas is her least favorite holiday, she's grateful that her opinion is slowly changing because of him. He reminds her that the holidays don't have to be lonely.

In the airport, EMILY hands AARON his shoes and jacket from the TSA inspection bucket. They sit at Gate 9, waiting on a flight to Seattle. She leans on his shoulder. Instead of traveling solo, instead of arriving or returning to someone, she finally gets to travel with a companion, a person she loves.

Aaron walked into these realistic scenarios often.⁶ Kind of hard not to when we hung out more frequently toward the end of our senior year. I knew he would be moving in August after his graduation, so I took advantage of any chance to be together.

IHOP is empty at 3 a.m., save for a few students cramming for finals. EMILY and AARON sit across each other in a booth. AARON's laptop is open but he spends more time looking at EMILY, discussing deep personal shit about life. They gulp coffee until they're over-caffeinated. There's nothing left to learn about each other. When he drops her off at her dorm, daylight breaks through the windows. He leans over the glovebox, the cliché romantic pause before a kiss, and—

He didn't catch my casual shift toward him, so I got out of the car.

A few mornings later Aaron texted me first, which was rare because I always texted first. He remembered me without my reminder.

Aaron: Do you ever just narrate people's lives in your head?

Emily: sometimes i imagine a future w them but i dont narrate their lives by itself, like im involved somehow

Aaron: What's usually the premise?

Emily: if someone says something that i agree w relationship-wise then i imagine us together and its a pretty good image in my mind

Aaron: Ooohhh... have you done that with me?

Emily: i mean yeah. i remember during the question game at maks you said you liked

⁶ I invited him to my dorm room after hanging out on campus as an experiment. I wanted to see if he would do something, knowing we were alone. We stood in the living room, watching the sunset fade out like a watered down lemonade. This could be a moment. We could dance to nothing, silhouetted by the ascending civil twilight. But as quickly as I formed the image, he made an excuse and left. He didn't complete the scenario.

cuddling so i kinda pictured that

Aaron: AAAAWWWW

Emily: but it CANT HAPPEN bc you dont LIVE HERE ANYMORE

Emily: even then i wouldnt be able to give you what you want so we aint star crossed lovers

I knew it'll never happen, us together. We wanted the image, not each other.

My drunk texts usually landed in Aaron's phone. He always played along. For that I was grateful. It made me pretend that I knew someone cared about me. And for some reason I was so damn brazen. Wish I could be that bold when I was sober.

Emily: i h8 being linely when im drunk

Aaron: Are you lonely?

Emily: yeah

Aaron: Why?

Emily: i dont have anyone who wants me i. their life

Aaron: I do...

Emily: but in a romantic way i mean not platonic

Aaron: So what?! Nobody wants me either.

Emily: buuuuuuuuuut

Emily: we coukd want eCh other

My loneliness quadrupled when I moved to Oregon for the summer, and then tripled that when I visited my friend in San Francisco for a week. Intimacy electrified everywhere, in the tourists on Pier 39 and the gay men at the Midnight Sun bar counter. I tried to forget what I didn't have by downing Long Islands and mojitos every night. My friend cuddled with his boyfriend in his apartment, all cinematic and shit, and when I realized that I was the third wheel the entire vacation,⁷ it made it very hard to breathe.

Emily: ugh ya know what really sucks

⁷ My friend chose his boyfriend over me on our night excursions, like he was trying to show off that he was in love and I was not in love with anyone, nor was anyone in love with me.

Aaron: What is it?

Emily: ive been hanging around a friend and his boyfriend for the last few days and it makes me feel really lonely

Aaron: Lonely how? Romantically?

Emily: yeah it makes me realize ive never had anyone really like me

Aaron: Can you help me understand the conundrum with being asexual and romantically starved?

Emily: i dont really want sex but i want to be in love w someone and someone love me. just without the physical intimacy (but i still want hugs and hand holding haha)

Aaron: You know that contradicts normal, socially acceptable, relationship protocol.

Emily: then again ive never had sex so idk if i do actually like it but i know right now i don't want to do it

Aaron: Do you know when you might?

Emily: when im really comfy w the guy

Aaron: So it's not like a time thing, it's a comfort thing.

Aaron: Meaning it doesn't matter when, it matters with whom.

Emily: yeah true but in general i dont want sex

Emily: im also really claustrophobic and i freak out when someones too close to me

Emily: but i feel over time if someone like conditions me to their touch then i might be open to it

Emily: its just that no ones even tried anything w me so i get really freaked out and think somethings wrong w me

I posted on Facebook that a guy had messaged me saying he was going to ask me to prom four years ago, but you know, high school society was shit, and he was worried about his popularity, asking the loner girl equated social suicide. Aaron commented that his prom sucked too.

Emily: yo what happened at your prom

Aaron: I went by myself. Saw all of my "friends" having the best time with their groups and occasionally say hi to me. I realized I KNEW a lot of ppl and I was well known, but that didn't mean I fit in. I was devastated. Nobody asked me to be in any group and I didn't ask anyone to prom because I was sure I would go since I didn't have a group.

Emily: dude that sucks. we shouldve gone to prom together

Aaron: I fucking wwwwwiiiiiiish I knew you then.

Emily: just want a slow dance. maybe when you visit me we can recreate prom in my apt

Aaron: I'm down.

I could see us dancing in my room to “Transatlanticism,” “This Year’s Love,” “400 Lux,” “Song 6,” whichever popped up on my playlist first. I could see us outlined in the fawn-tinted streetlamps that glowed through my window with the blinds up. I could see us close,

*I need you so much closer,
this year’s love had better last,
(and I like you),
we are only dreaming and I am dreaming only of you.*

I could feel his hands on my hips, I could feel the slow sway above my green Ikea rug, I could feel my eyes softening into happiness.

But I had never actually experienced these things, so all I felt were the fallacy of fingerprints frictioning my skin.

We could be beautiful, actually.⁸ I knew we wanted the same cliché domestic bliss someday. On Tumblr he reblogged romantic vignettes like “Marry me so I can film you doing regular everyday shit and I’ll edit little movies of our lives so you can see how beautiful you are to the rest of the universe.” We didn’t really want kids—“it’s a fucked up world,” he said. I agreed, but I didn’t want kids for biological reasons. I was afraid I’d mess up the child.

⁸ On Mother’s Day I texted him that I got in a car accident the day before. He immediately called me, worried I was hurt, asked about what happened. I left the dining room with an unusual grin and went outside. I secretly enjoyed the eyes on me, wondering who I was talking to. My family didn’t know I’m asexual, but they did assume I had never had a relationship, which was true.

Before we hung up, he said, “I love you, Em Gem.”

“Yeah.”

“I love you, Em Gem,” he repeated, knowing my “yeah” was an indicator I didn’t actually hear him.

“Oh, love you too, Aaron.” That was not the first time he told me he loved me.^{8A}

^{8A} A few months prior I had called work after I got off, asking him to find my water bottle and put it aside. We made a few jokes and then he said it, those five words, which jumpstarted cliché butterflies in my stomach. I returned four words with a smile, hoping my happiness beamed through the customer service phone. The next shift I got my bottle back, taped with a note: “Em Gem’s, don’t throw away! Aaron :)”

Aaron: Mess it up how?

Emily: what if i pass on my hearing loss? im already messed up haha

Aaron: That doesn't make you messed up at all.

Emily: wellll i had a pretty lonely childhood bc of it and i dont want any kids to go through what i went through

Aaron: They won't. You'll know. You'll get your kid involved.

Emily: hmm. well. your kids will be bootiful with ur charming smile

Emily: mini bruno mars

I never went deep enough to imagine us having kids together, though to a certain extent I conceptualized a future without him, and I was okay with that.

Aaron finally came up from Austin and stayed with me for a weekend. He didn't have to—he had other friends here. We at least agreed he'd stay the first night, hang out with former coworkers and get drunk. That was the only way I could possibly handle someone touching me, if we were to get that far. I planned for the plausibility of him wandering off to my bed.

At the door he pulled me into a tight hug, and my skin prickled. I should've gotten toasted before he arrived.⁹ We were settled in this awkward silence: our phone personae did not match our real personality. The summer of Sentimental Conversations¹⁰ did not translate to Real Life. I suggested we started drinking. With two other people we finished off his pineapple vodka and my

⁹ Consulting alcohol to deal with intimacy issues isn't smart, I know, but I'd rather the room spin vertiginous before feeling a hand veneering over my body.

¹⁰ **Aaron:** I love you.

Emily: love ya too

Aaron: Say it like you mean it.

Emily: I'm in love with you, and I'm not in the business of denying myself the simple pleasure of saying true things. I'm in love with you, and I know that love is just a shout into the void, and that oblivion is inevitable, and that we're all doomed and that there will come a day when all our labor has been returned to dust, and I know the sun will swallow the only earth we'll ever have, and I am in love with you.

Emily: ... John Green *The Fault in Our Stars* (2012)

Bacardi 151,¹¹ played Cards Against Humanity. The night bloomed in a fuzzy stupor, and I didn't realize he went to my room until my roommate winked and told me to go to sleep.

The last thing I remembered before passing out was looking at Aaron in my bed, torn between crawling in beside him and taking the couch. My paradox of wanting to be touched and avoiding touch threw my head into an already insane lucidity from the mere idea that I could potentially sleep with someone. I've shared beds before, my stepsister and girl friends, but never with a guy. Never had the chance, nor would I have jumped at it sober.

But I was blacking out, I was watching myself in movies I'd always been jealous of, the scene where the main character and her Love Interest™ snuggle up in bed, the camera fading like eyelids before sleep.¹² The things I saw us do in my dreams were becoming real, imbricating numerous spectral versions into a tangible scenario. This was it.

Somewhere in the night the alcohol wore off, the room inert, the hurricane in my liver sloshed lightly. I slightly opened my eyes to see if I or Aaron had moved to the couch. When I consciously realized he was curved against me, my heart erupted into a 6.1 magnitude earthquake.¹³

I fell in love with the moment, the experience, the thought that someone wanted to hold me. I didn't care that it was Aaron; I knew nothing more would come from this. He respected my boundaries, didn't try to put my hand where I didn't want it, didn't force me to do anything sexual.

¹¹ Fucked me up the next day in a torturous hangover. I hadn't been hungover since I was seventeen, blackout drunk for the first time, and I had tried to cuddle with a different guy, unsuccessfully. Desperation wasn't hot, I learned.

¹² *Crazy, Stupid, Love. (500) Days of Summer. The Proposal.* Sappy cliché romantic shit.

¹³ I didn't stop shaking for twenty minutes. *This is why I get drunk*, I thought, *to keep myself oblivious to what's actually happening.* I tried to focus on the lamp's silhouette on the wall, tried to ignore the fact that I felt his penis against my ass, but I trembled harder knowing his breaths dissipated into my neck.^{13A}

^{13A} I was paralyzed but I didn't feel violated, please don't think that way. For the first time someone (who I kinda liked) actually invaded my personal space, and I welcomed that. When I internally brace myself for impact, I am fine. It's when it's unexpected that I do not appreciate contact, like if someone were to knock into me on a sidewalk or bump my chair when they sit down.

But I knew this moment would remain a liminal memory, another phantasm that haunted me, one night out of the thousands I've slept through alone. This night counted, though not really. There was no emotional connection tied to him after all. We were not dating. I was not in love with him. I prepared myself to categorize this as a fling, just-for-funsies; we were only friends and sleeping together was Not At All Awkward.

Our knees touched when I flipped over. This was a reasonable distance, though my heart never calmed down. He was nothing special, and I was another girl he had slept with.

We both woke at seven. He got up for water, I rubbed my eyes dried with contacts that I forgot to take out. I stared at myself in the bathroom mirror. I've got the usual waxing gibbous dark circles, tangled wavy hair, shiny pores across semi-blemished cheeks. But there was something different here. Something I hadn't seen before in my many mornings of rushing to class or work.

My face glowed, an illuminance of tiny vessels freckled the surface. My eyes smiled without my lips turned up, scleras bright like nimbus clouds. A post-orchasm¹⁴ radiance mapped upon my skin.

I looked happy.

We returned to bed, where he was the little spoon this time, made a joke and laughed, and grabbed my arm to stretch over his ribcage. We slept again, though I was much too conscious to consider going back into a deep sleep. After an hour we switched and I put his hand in mine, the earthquake resuming its seismic waves. I didn't shake but my heart didn't shut up. The touch

¹⁴ In *Infinite Jest*, Wallace means this as "the closest a person can come to a state of total calm and zero stimulus may very well be that tiny moment of no-thing, or the chasm, in an orgasm, which can ironically only be achieved through much stimulation." I mean this as the pleasure it was to have been held all night, when I had never been amorously held in my entire life, excited me in the most non-sexual way possible. It is the ultimate form of intimacy, I suppose, to remain inertial with someone, someone who reciprocated the very thing you wanted most.

reinvigorated dead blood cells, demolished the blockade my body learned to assemble over the last twenty-two years. The triggers lined beneath my skin weren't alarmed the longer we stayed entangled.

Then we faced each other, his leg over mine. Behind him I could see the clear white light of day streaking in, the photic aesthetic of an indie film. A somnolent morning. This was like the movies. This was what happened after the blackout.

"Em Gem, we broke like, every friendship barrier last night."

"We certainly did. We cuddled hardcore. Canoodled."

"Canoodled, what the fuck. I love you."

I knew he didn't really love me like that. I didn't love him like that either.¹⁵

Aaron went out with friends the second night, and I cleaned up yesterday's mess with my roommate. The magic was gone—I needed it again, one more time.

"I feel like I'm using him," I said while stacking the cards I had thrown to the floor back in the box. "I was hoping he'd stay in and do domestic shit with me, lie on the couch and watch *Portlandia*, cook dinner and have wine. It's like, now that I have someone who was willing to do something semi-romantic, I kinda want to see what else can happen. A slow dance. A kiss. Something. But I'm being really selfish because he has a life outside of being here with me, he has friends. And I know he's not trying to start something. He wouldn't want to. I don't either."

"Yeah, you're not dating him."

"He's not obligated to do anything with me. He can sleep on the couch tonight if he feels like last night was enough. And, if I were to ask when he's coming back, or say I'm going to sleep a

¹⁵ Entertaining the idea of the moment and wanting the experience, but not the person, is a fucked up thing to admit.

certain time, he might stay wherever he is and then I lose a second chance of being with him.”

“True. True. I think you’re hyping this up too much, though. He’ll come back.”

I cleared away the bottles, the cups. Everything that happened last night actually happened.

“That’s the thing. I’m hyping up the scenario. The second I realize it could be real, I do everything I can to manipulate the situation. And it’s shitty. He doesn’t deserve that.”

“Boys are idiots. You deserve everything you’re thinking of.”

“Well, thanks. Took me long enough to even be held by a guy. That’s really all I could ask for at this point.”

But I was asking for more. Way more than I should’ve been allowed.

In “Buona Notte,” Dev and Francesca dance closely wound to Italian music, shadowed by circumfulgent cobalt and claret sconces. The pictorial allure is voyeuristic, excruciatingly poignant; an image I was still searching to complete. I wanted Aaron to come home and dance with me, glowing below string lights in a quixotic haze. The playlist of songs on my computer hummed and peony candles wafted saccharine. All the aesthetics of a typical romantic scene rendered into abeyance as I tried to stay awake as late as I could. I watched the gloaming moon disappear into dawn, and eventually I turned off the lights, blew the candles out. The fuliginous wisps curled in the soundless atmosphere.

At seven Aaron stumbled in my room, took off his shirt, and made me hold him. He smelled like red wine, which I found odd because he preferred to drink shots. Later he told me he hooked up.

I shouldn’t have been annoyed. I wasn’t even his fucking girlfriend. At least he came back to sleep, when he could’ve taken the couch to not wake me up. But I felt the magnetism was lost:¹⁶

¹⁶ It seemed too realistic this time. What the movies didn’t show. My contacts and hearing aids were out, my room felt like a 101-degree fever. It wasn’t the perfect moment anymore. It was raw and stale, unscripted. An inconvenience.

the morning before I was happy and alive. Now I felt guilty and empty.

We woke up at 9:30ish and laid in bed until eleven, tapping on our phones. The silence was ordinary. We stayed connected, facing each other, our wrists crossed. Every now and then he glanced at me, but I didn't look at him. He did not exceed my expectations. I used him to conquer an unachievable dream that he didn't even know about.

There's a scene in "The Dinner Party" where after Francesca is dropped off at her hotel, the screen remains on Dev's disappointed face, wondering what could've been if Francesca had stayed with him, whether for the night or for forever. For three minutes of the same, uncut frame, we see Dev agonizing over the perfect woman out of reach. Dev wants her to fit his unfair image just as badly as I wanted Aaron to fit mine.

Except Aaron will always be an ersatz memory for something that I wanted to be really real. I loved him, but not like that. I loved him for presenting the opportunity to get out of my comfort zone, for holding me even when I trembled, for not leaving the room during my destruction. I loved him for allowing me to use him for an experience. He grazed the glass but did not break through it, merely indulging only my dreams and not the disappointing reality.

He packed up, and I was ready for him to leave. We walked to his car, where he hugged me, kissed my cheek. The canoodling was fun, I said, and he laughed. Broke a lot of barriers.

I wondered what his eyes saw when he woke up with me. I recalled the two columns of black roses tattooed on his back, the way he crooked his arm above the pillow, his thermal body a meniscus against my frame, his breathing out of his mouth slowly then quickly. I wondered if he watched me lick my lips for chapstick, wipe away oil from my cheekbones. I wondered if he

Astigmatic. A vision that failed to coalesce.

noticed that the glow from the morning before was dull now.

We looked at each other again, and I did not feel my eyes soften, or the linger of his hand on my back, or anything that had happened in the last 48 hours.

“I love you, Em Gem.”

“Love you too, Aaron.”

I walked back to my apartment and lied down on my empty bed.¹⁷

¹⁷ **Alternate Ending:** They glimpse at each other, AARON's burnt umber irises gazing into EMILY's hazel-red, with a grin. AARON's hand holds onto EMILY's wrist, the only barrier in between them. The audience sees this as love, complete love, the act of post-coitus minus the actual coitus. The audience waits for them to say the three words that are always at the end of the scene, the definitive confirmation that last night, this morning, was real, was magnificent. "Tiny Vessels" by Death Cab for Cutie plays in the background. This is not a pleasant song. It sounds sweet, but the final lyrics resonate, heartbreakingly:

*So one last touch and then you'll go
and we'll pretend that it meant something so much more
but it was vile, and it was cheap
and you are beautiful but you don't mean a thing to me.*

FADE TO BLACK.