

This is Not a Love Letter

by Isabel Pask

this is not a love letter
and I have written many

at least
it is not a love letter to any
particular body
that I once turned into a landing place for
"i love you"
that it is not

i can tell you a story of a room standing still
a doctor with a degree spewing
statistical improbabilities
but i don't understand but I had an iud
how my boyfriend picked me up in a honda crv
how we tried to get frozen yogurt
how the place was closed
how we sat on the couch with nowhere to go

i can tell you a story of silence
of march snow wrapping the planned parenthood on whitney
in a quiet sort of warmth
a blanket of solidarity
that maybe god laid it himself to keep the protestors away
how i came armed against them anyway
my mother and the boy who used to love me at my side

how inside
a handful of women sat quiet
escorted to a holding room alone
how you're made to do this on your own
a loop of kardashians on the television
hours of waiting
a toddler complaining
how the woman with a cross on her neck
prepped an iv on wheels
asked me just how much i wanted to feel
how i answered nothing at all
how it didn't feel real
dear god, do you hate me?

please please just sedate me

and maybe i'm afraid to tell this story
because it is unfamiliar territory
afraid i won't tell it right, how my heart felt tight
how so many mornings after i could not find a light
afraid that to touch the memory of that morning
is to invite in the masses who claim they know more than me
maybe i'm afraid of being seen
of being heard
maybe i'm afraid for those that won't see themselves in my words

i am sick of the justification
the drawn-out explanations
the expectation
to make excuses so everyone understands
i always was safe
always played by the rules
always wanted to believe this wasn't the choice i'd choose
but no one should be allowed to tell me how i'm supposed to feel
to walk for a mile in my own damn shoes
and then to see it on the news

i didn't know how talk to god for a month straight
but the moment i did i found he was never ashamed

and i have no obligation to tell this story but it is not told enough
and the road has been rough but i have had to learn what tough is
and i want to be brave and i want to take up space
I want to be *enraged*

I want to say that 1 in 4 us women by the age of 45
live their everyday lives
some of them carrying memories they've been taught they need to hide
how despite it all they learn to *thrive*

please understand me when i say the act of choosing is indispensable
that for me to imagine a lack thereof is incomprehensible
that this choosing continues to strengthen my elasticity, my tenacity
that i have learned how to bounce back and back and back
to become so familiar with my own shape
that i can return to it when i'm stretched beyond what i thought i could take

this is resilience

i carry resilience in the hollowed out holes of my heartbreak
the ones that don't heal easy
the ones that are hard to see
the way i resolve each day to not be afraid
to wear the clothes that i want to
to dream the dreams i'm told not to

i will not be afraid to take up more space
I will demand it
I will try and understand it

i will tell a story of resilience over and over
for myself, for my mother, for my little sister
for the loves in my life, the warriors, the resisters
who wake up each day with mouths that sing and bones that dance
whose choice to live boldly is not simply by chance

I will learn how to write a love letter to myself
in the nothing-night to nobody at all
to four walls to empty space
I will learn how to write it
until my own body
becomes the landing place
for "i love you."