



Dear You,^{1,2}

It seems the pattern is that you arrive with heavy bottomed bottles and leave me with the corners of the oily foil of condom packets sprinkled around my room. You take the bottle (now empty) and the other stuff that could be connected to your visit and this is kind I guess although I know it is because it is also evidence of what happened, which is a filling of me and a stillness in me which is so complete that sometimes I feel I was a wired puppet who had become frazzled in my strings and you made them lace, or silk, as then I am still in my lace & silk & messy with you. And you and I we get to the point where you ask me to tell you of all the times when I felt you before you were there and there were many times when I wished for you and you weren't. Like the time today earlier when I was held for hours trying to get out of the airport I had you calming me and they were going through my equipment + I thought it's ok because I was on my way to you. And then the silly stuff you are so anxious to ask about like when I was 24 and in a room in Alexandria + there was the sea + I was studying lying on a bed (why did you ask about the bedcover?) + the window was open a bit + I lay there with dreams of a knuckled hand on my hip bone – a grasp of desire – which I can only describe as being you and all the decisions and choices I have taken to lead me to where I am that I can only say were because I one day wanted to explain them to you. You were there when I dreamed of kisses and fairy tale princes. You were there in the US Army bar in Baghdad when the man, the soldier with the biceps (I can't spell, sorry I'm still a bit whirring & buzzed. I'm not a speller I'm a doer) and small, reckless eyes leant for me, not at all scared of the face that I have, that I have had to professionally train to be angular (so angular now I feel I am nothing but a skull trying to grow on a stick) and prim, to portray competence, reliability + trust, to be UTTERLY UNAPPROACHABLE because there shouldn't be a single asshole out there who watches the news who hasn't seen my perfected mug beamed into their space on their screen but that asshole had

the AUDACITY to lean at me going on about my skinny ass & they laughed, the group. Why he got to me I don't know but I had just come back from the South and had the stink of bodies + gas in my nose and the grab, grinding rush of flying over dust roads in a jeep with a tag car + a lead + even then you know I felt you were there.

And today you were there but I didn't want to tell you about the cameraman who they've been going for saying he's Intelligence and I'm now the most senior and they treat me like it's my show (I'm not ringmaster but hey, I'm close) that I'm resp'b to get him out + there we were with my phone blipping away on the desk with like a gazillion texts + emails from London, Washington, NY, Head Office pinging through + I just had to say what the fuck? You know I needed you because, hey, you might come with a heavy bottomed bottle of bubbly + I can glam the whole thing up and you can turn me into lace-stringed limp loveliness and transform me back into a girl in this hotel room so I don't have to cope with all the shit going on out there which was insane today btw if you haven't seen the news but I needed you and I knew it would just be a couple of hours because then you are XXXX XXXX XXXX XXXX wife GONE which is you know, the deal which I took on board from the outset + that's cool except it's hard when I see you like the line of constant that has run throughout my life + when you are so intent on knowing every part of it + I feel sometimes that it was easier when you existed in my life before I knew you.

Notes:

1. This letter was found, according to Selma Dabbagh, in a hotel wastepaper basket some months ago. It was clearly never intended for publication.

2. Selma Dabbagh is a writer of fiction. Her first novel, *Out of It*, set between Gaza, London and the Gulf was published by Bloomsbury in 2011. She has also published short stories with Granta, International PEN, Telegram, and others. Her first play, *The Brick*, set in East Jerusalem, was produced by BBC Radio 4 in January 2014. She is currently working on her second novel, provisionally entitled, *We Are Here Now*. For more information, see selmadabbagh.com

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even men you know I felt you were there.
Today to you was there but I didn't want to tell
about the camera man who may've been going
young his intelligence & the now he must serve
I do my show but not ~~actually~~ master but help him
to get him out & there we were with the my phone
& away on my desk with like a gazillion texts from
Washington, NY & head office ~~with ping pong~~
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