

ERICA-NOEL ORTEGA

*It's Not You it's Me
(And other Lies told at
Kickapoo State Park)*

Lowered to the ground, I awaken. An air mattress inside the tent slowly deflating me on it. Fierce air hits my mitten-less fingers, the right side empty save for leaf flakes and grass stains. Wrinkly green tent flaps echo the whirring around me.

My heart fist bumps my ribs
repeatedly, chanting “where’d he go, where’d he go?”
he left me, he had taken off in his car and drove the three hours
home. No, no he didn’t leave me here and abandon all his gear.
that black bag he carried himself in still at the head of our bed.
mcdonalds cups of coke and dr pepper sitting in my shoes.
I peak out the zippered flap and see his face staring,
staring at our first home together. Just zips and ties and
insecurity knitting us like home sweet home.

We had a silent breakfast that morning,
cooking pancakes on a fire that wouldn't start.
he took the mushy clumps to give me the perfect
disks we covered in butter and syrup. Words didn't
come to me, only peaceful eye-hugs and blanket smiles.
In the 1:00am distance I now see the lingering sad
creep up his eyes and reach his hair. He was high,
and for once I was sober.

Where I saw peace, he saw a lingering melancholy,
a black cloud I warned about, that he called cute
mere weeks before. my own rot and dust that
caked even the shiniest basin of my lungs.
breathing in that stench I covered with Victoria's Secret
perfume.

A crow I was, gliding my feathers under him, the wind.
and as I made the corny joke just days before, he would
laugh. but behind his 1:00am stare was the plans,
the plans he promised a me he never met. the fifty odd
years of maybes and tiny houses. behind his small
lunch smile was a world without me.
and in it, there was no me to capture
the wind. the crow never existed,
neither did the houses, travelers, and cards.