

## Lessons in Minimalism

You left the same way you came. One Adidas gym bag, a black backpack and a matching set of four tupperware containers. But your minimalism was more than the lack of stuff. It was how you moved through the world with a feather-like tolerance for office politics, the slenderness of your friend group, and the silence which was a guiding principle of what I knew of your life.

It was February 12th, 2020, both of us were subletting the same apartment. We were strangers to each other until that day. The snow had melted from the ground and we were seeking entry points to a new life. 71 Brighton Avenue was our way in. You told me, over Facebook chat, that you were from Colorado. You came to Boston for work two months prior, and had been staying with a friend until you found a place.

Your profile picture had mountains in the background, your soft face in the foreground. Your tagged photos told me you liked to travel. Regions of Utah that looked more like Mars, kayaks nestled into little inlets in Monterey, and wide open meadows in Idaho.

I knew it was you when I saw the rugged Jeep with fire hazards on in the firelane on Brighton Avenue. I learned later you didn't have a car, that was your friend's Jeep. On one end of the street, you could see the Prudential, the heart of downtown Boston. Towards the other, rubble gathered in the neighboring construction site where cranes pieced together box-like condominiums.

Somehow, we met in the middle of it all. You, almost thirty, working in Software Engineering. I knew this because I had checked your LinkedIn Profile. I, in my second graduate program, writing furiously, and doing gigwork that barely paid the bills. The match seemed to work so well that even I couldn't imagine the world turning ours upside down months later as it did.

You accompanied me on an Ikea trip, you told me you had left Colorado after a break up. She was studying to be a lawyer, and you both wanted different things. I didn't respond. Even though we just met, your silence was familiar to me. I knew that if I left your words in thin air in the open space between us, somehow, you would feel moved to fill it. "I proposed to her, and she said no. I sort of thought things were going great, but I guess she didn't."

Later, you built my bed frame and told me about your moving company back in Colorado. You, an entrepreneur, a mover, a minimalist, loved taking long cross-country trips with people's things. You told me, "It was crazy, seeing how much stuff people had. One lady had been widowed for years, and she just had so much stuff. It was really sad. I've always told myself, never have more than you need. Just in case you need to pick up and leave". That night, you told

me as you were screwing in the nail to the bedpost, you were going to “leave it a little loose”. You told me it was always good to do that with furniture, so that it would be easier to move. Most days we lived together in silence, the radiator raging its internal mechanisms. Your door was always left ajar. Sometimes I peered in and asked how your day went. We exchanged light words and I noticed the way your room was arranged with the tenets of minimalism. A bed, with one pillow. A sleeping bag in place of a comforter.

In March, the pandemic hit. I booked a one-way flight to Florida and told you I didn’t know when I’d be back. When I returned in May, all the windows in the apartment were open. You had a desk in your room: something new.

In the following months, the silences grew greater.

We had nothing to say.

You bought a car and added your own self-driving technology. We went for a drive. You started out slow in our neighborhood. Once we got on the Mass Turnpike, you accelerated. Then you took your hands off the wheel.

On the drive home, you told me you planned to move soon: “Maybe Montana. Houses are cheap there. I kind of just want to live in the mountains.. Away from everything”.

Two weeks later, I asked when you thought you’d make the move officially. “I’m not sure”, you winced a little. Your expression became brighter as you added, “Maybe tonight?”

I laughed.

When I heard your mattress being heaved singlehandedly down the hall at three in the morning that night, I knew what was happening. I helped you bring your mattress to the dumpster behind our building. You left your new desk for me. Within thirty minutes, you were packed up.

For Matthew, minimalism was never really about material space, or the shedding of things. It was wanting so little, that you never had anything to lose.

I still think about all the pain you were in. And I wonder now, what you’ve lost, what you’ve gained, and if you’re still shaving the unnecessary stuff from your life.

Are you in California, hauling couches into a trash dump? Are you back in Colorado with lawyer girl? Or maybe, you’re still in Montana, in your house, sitting on the wooden floor with your single mug enjoying your morning coffee. That’s how I like to picture you.