My brother Johnny was eight years old when he started drawing mazes on his bedroom walls. I was twelve and admired him for it, because I had little artistic ability. He had stacks of spiral-bound notebooks full of less complex mazes, and there were days when he flipped through the pages, and revised scenes for the wall. He used pencil, he told me, because he needed to be able to erase tunnels and add passageways until he was finished, until he was able to perfect the entire piece. He worked everyday and put our house in the middle of what he called the commotion: One step out the door, and there you were, wandering through a garden at first, then crawling through a tunnel. You’d find yourself at a church, bar or gas station, and you’d stay there and try again tomorrow or go back home.

Johnny has been dead for years. He called his maze Wasteland, and I have lived here all of my life. I am in his room, and the door is closed. The room is bare and empty, except for the tiny cities on the walls.

* * *

I work at Wasteland Disco-Mat every night between midnight and five a.m. It’s down on Fourth Street, five blocks from where I live. I enjoy the late walks to the laundromat turned discothèque in my pajamas. The trees never fail to move with the cool wind. The red neon sign glows through the dark, and has not once burned out.

Patrick comes in, and as usual sits near the front and writes in his notebook. He wears skinny jeans, a tight brown shirt, a spiky belt, and has a multicolored Mohawk. He never has a load of laundry, and if you don’t come in with basket or trash bag full of dirty clothes, we charge a five dollar cover.

He pays each night, and as he does, I hear he plans to rescue the 20-year-old cat version of a Chevy truck abandoned in Wasteland.

“Hey!” I shout over the music. “You thinking.”

It sounds like I’m trying to kick him out the way.

He glances out the window, and as usual, they head straight to the bar, straight, straight man flipping bottles and pouring down staring each one down as he or she heads outside, and I follow him.

Patrick kneels down next to the cat. She remains still, eyes closed, “Cynthia doesn’t need saving,” I say.

“Her name’s Cynthia? That’s a woman’s name,” he says.

“Here’s the thing about this cat: She’s retired,” I say.

“Sarah, cats aren’t religious.”

“Where’ve you been living the past twenty years?”

He looks up from Cynthia as though it’s a secret. “Yeah,” I say.

“Look,” I continue. “She’s lived here, she wants, she once was a great hunter. She’s retired from all this. The cats are safe. She’s content and happy.”

“Yeah,” he says.

“Okay,” I say. "We’ll leave her."
He pays each night, and as he does, I glance at his notebook and see that he plans to rescue the 20-year-old cat who sleeps underneath a junkyard version of a Chevy truck abandoned in the alley next to the building.

“Hey!” I shout over the music. “You know this place isn’t good for thinking.”

It sounds like I’m trying to kick him out, but I don’t mean it that way.

He glances out the window, and a crowd stumbles in, money ready. They head straight to the bar, straight to Jeremy Lovehorn, the man flipping bottles and pouring drinks, his green, crocodile eyes staring each one down as he or she places an order. Patrick walks outside, and I follow him.

Patrick kneels down next to the cat, and stretches out his hand to her. She remains still, eyes closed, paws tucked under her body.

“Cynthia doesn’t need saving,” I say.

“Her name’s Cynthia? That’s a woman’s name,” Patrick says.

“Here’s the thing about this cat: She, like most cats, is religious.”

“Sarah, cats aren’t religious.”

“Where’ve you been living the past eighteen years?” I ask.

He looks up from Cynthia as though I had uncovered his darkest secret. “Yeah,” I say.

“Look,” I continue. “She’s lived her life, she comes and goes as she wants, she once was a great hunter who dropped off mice and rats and raccoons and the occasional possum to her proud owner. She’s retired from all this.
But what I really mean, and what she will tell you if you just ask, is that she understands, she knows, and, yes, it's because she's a revisionist, fully leading all her nine lives and everything, but look at her—"

I kneel down next to Patrick and she peeks at us, then squeezes her eyes shut again.

“She looks completely serene, doesn’t she?”

Patrick eyes me as though I’m a talking disco ball.

Managing the disco-mat keeps me distracted—Lovehorn keeps me distracted—but in my permanent thought rotation is the fact that I still cannot get out of this damn maze. I’m not sure I even want to anymore.

Jeremy Lovehorn works the bar, and I mean works it. Women and men swoon over him like he’s Elvis, like he’s Johnny Depp. His green, crocodile eyes have a vibe, a quiet, soft indescribable vibe you feel and understand as soon as he looks at you. Lovehorn can’t help this. He can’t keep that vibe quiet. But he sure can turn it up when he wants to. I feel it every time he looks at me, then it becomes strange, too much, and I shake it off, or tell him to stop staring.

“Lovehorn,” I say. “When will you learn?”

“Lovehorn,” I continue. “You gotta start workin’ the other girls.”

I nod toward Kellie. She’s sporting her usual white and green polka dot pajamas, and watching her panties spin and spin, making sure nobody steals them.

Lovehorn laughs and says, “How many quarters you got? I’m on break soon.” His eyes dart to the coin-operated make out rooms, then back to mine.

Garment thieves will always be a problem, especially since we serve alcohol, but I’ve noticed over the past three, four months people becoming more and more consumed with themselves, or with possessing other people they happen to be with.

Presumably this is where love leads, with the music and lights and plasma screens.

Everyone is slowly becoming obsessed with what goes on inside for a random show. They’re transfixed like when you first fall in love with naked. They’re already obsessed with screens, and they don’t even know it.

I dig in my purse for quarters. Lovehorn’s eyes dart to the coin-operated make out rooms, then back to mine.

“Sarah, before we go inside, hear me out. I’ll buy you back a shot of vodka, then another a few minutes?”

“What’re you talking about,” I say.

“Religion,” he says. “We can live forever.”

He must be caught up in something, mean our souls?” I ask.

“No, I mean our bodies.”

“I’ve ordered gallons and gallons of Life. We have to start taking baths in half a bottle of vodka. Will there be candles and red wine?”

He pulls out a bottle from under the label: Bathe in it every night, and you can drink it straight down, like it’s beer.

“What happened to the vodka?” I ask.

“Balance. You should know that.”
Presumably this is where love leads. Not to mention their fascination with the music and lights and plasma TVs and coin-operated make out rooms.

Everyone is slowly becoming obsessed with these rooms, but when we show what goes on inside for a random four minutes here and there, they are transfixed like when you first see the person you’re profoundly in love with naked. They’re already obsessed with what we put on those screens, and they don’t even know it. This will always make me smile.

I dig in my purse for quarters. Lovehorn lets fall a handful—they sound like a hard, brief rain on the roof, then they settle.

“Sarah, before we go inside, hear me out,” Lovehorn says. He throws back a shot of vodka, then another and another, eyeing me. “Want some?”

“What’re you talking about,” I say. “And, yes, I do want some.”

“Religion,” he says. “We can live forever.”

He must be caught up in something, again, or drunk already. “Do you mean our souls?” I ask.

“No, I mean our bodies.”

“I’ve ordered gallons and gallons of Heavenly Blessing and Water of Life. We have to start taking baths in it. Bubble baths,” he says.

“Will there be candles and red wine too?”

He pulls out a bottle from under the counter. He shows me the back label: *Bathe in it every night, and you will live forever.* Then he chugs it straight down, like it’s beer.

“What happened to the vodka?” I ask.

“Balance. You should know that.”
He hops the counter, takes my hand and pulls me toward the back wall. I tug back, trying to slip free. His hands are smooth, rough and strong. They don’t like to let go.

"Hey, I have to tell you something, but only if you promise to believe me," I say.

As he drops quarters in slots, I tell him that no one has died or fallen in love recently, here at the disco-mat or in Wasteland. He closes the door and kisses me. My brain collapses into a perfect black out, and for once I kiss him back.

It's not about the bees.

We dream differently, faces to the ground listening for the tremble of the water table set for who knows who?

It's flowing through this earth and that earth, weaving the earths into a primordial ooze. This is a myth. Who knows what is true?

In my dreams you are naked and bleeding; you have three children; you are a black butterfly; we argue.

I am a tree. Rooted. Watching you move.