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Michelle Nemetchek

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THEY HAD MOUNTAIN RANGES BEHIND THEM

MICHELLE NEMETCHEK

Crispy salads and thin pizza atop our table,
I sat across a sweet-faced girl and her boyfriend.
I talked to him about gardening. PEAS farm,
cold weather that spring. How the frost
kept the shovels from piercing the ground,
even in March. One of his pant legs
was eaten from bike gears and dirt.

When we walked, the three of us, he would run
ahead, jumping off ledges of buildings or climbing bridges
to a better view of the city. He was a photographer.
She was a better one.

She sat next to him, long hair,
simple string bracelets, watching him talk
with lasting infatuation. I ate a slice
of apple off my salad.
“How long have you been together?”

“A year, maybe?”

Her arms and cheeks were freckled from the sun.
“He’s the only person I can travel
with that doesn’t infuriate me.”
We laughed, but what a feat.
Traveling tears families apart at Disneyland--
pushes friends to fight after long road trips.
Something about a sense of place
changes a person.

Later, they got a dog,
the trademark of a solid relationship.
An Australian Cattle with piercing blue eyes,
they take him hiking out in Arizona—
hot red sand, cooling at night,
making campfires with the old wood.