



BEFORE AND AFTER

“MEET INTELLIGENT, SENSITIVE singles just like you!” the classified ad coaxed. I don’t know if it was those words that first caught my eye or the advertisement below it, the diet pill ad that coupled Before and After photos. In the Before picture, a large, fuzzy woman avoided the camera. In the After version, a slim, focused woman smiled straight into the lens. The photos were supposed to be of the same person, but I couldn’t find any resemblance between the two faces.

I was eighteen, driving my 1976 Hornet around singing songs about rain: “Raindrops Keep Fallin’ on My Head,” “Kathy’s Song,” and “Just When I Needed You Most,” which had not too long ago played constantly on the radio: *You left in the rain without closing the door . . .*

Before and After

I sang in my car, but in public, it was as if I'd taken a vow of silence. Talking was dangerous. I felt one word away from spilling over, losing it, falling apart. In the six months since Cole had abruptly dumped me, I'd imagined myself as the Before photo, blurred, sloppy, my boundaries slipping. I wanted to be the direct, confident, cleanly contained person in the After photo.

As if the pairing of the classified and the diet ads were deliberate and had something to do with each other, I sent in my ten dollars to meet other intelligent, sensitive singles. And that's how I, the girl who could barely speak, met a mute man.