

English 101

Yesterday
I thought it remarkable:
we strip mine sand and stone to dig up precious starstuff
scattered here ages ago, carbon dated with precision
(well beyond my meager grasp of chemistry—a science,
[it seems]
I should have doubled down in)
in order to send up our own stars.

Magnesium, phosphorous, aluminum
potassium, sulphur—talk
to your fireworks enthusiast long enough
and you, too,
will sense of the cosmic appeal.

My life so far has been shockingly
interdisciplinary.

Still, everywhere I go, English 101 haunts me.
Sitting in the same small space,
(always the yellowed linoleum,
the brick cube at the far edge of campus)
listening to the other undergrads scrabbling feebly against
(hopefully)
the surface of a poem, or
(more likely)
an inscrutable essay that *isn't really that hard*.

Years of bad science fiction
and worse fantasy
(with gems strewn here and there
amongst the Tor and Doubleday,
the Bantam and Penguin)
prepared me with a singular knack
for the game:

every time we speak—*every time*—your hand finds its way to my knee, as if to punctuate
that *this is the good part. this is the most important thing*. i've learned to listen attentively,
with or without prompting.

the coffee filters are always stuck together, and only you can separate them—my hands
far too clumsy to find the fine edge, too distracted by the rich smell of beans waiting to
be ground and the soft lemon scent of your deodorant.

i can't look you in the eyes without licking my lips, mouth dry. i know if i could dodge
your glances, somehow deflect your attention, i might catch a glimpse—a sideways
look—at the magic in the way you hold your head and bare your teeth with ferocious joy.

We're hard-wired to make meaning.
You don't have to be
a student of literature milking the professor
or a fifth-year ceramics student pimping out
(our plumping up)
your portfolio
or a Facebook freedom fighter cherry-picking articles
to see that we love to find meaning
(particularly where there probably isn't any)
in everything around us, brains
hard-wired
and wearing away softly
to identify patterns.

That's the game:

making
meaning.

It's an active phrase; a process we force on the world;
a cookie cutter,
plunging, delineating, defining:

my father is diagnosed not once but *twice* with cancer. apparently, the combination of old habits and unmanageable elation are deadly in combination. i am unsure whether or not i can handle the waiting room—but i go anyway. i read *Great Expectations*, and wonder: if my father is Magwitch—who am i?

i'm a thousand feet across the school when the shooter stops *right outside my classroom*. i do not know this until later that day; long after i've tried to find each and every one of my students, long after everyone has gone home or been sent home or been *taken* home i wonder just what *i would have done*.

whenever I run, my breath drums out the syllables of your name: one-two *threefourfive* one-two *threefourfive*. i wonder if i could ever have a place in your life. i keep running, knowing better than to ask.

Perhaps,
in retrospect,
chemistry would have been
a more profitable path of study.

After all,
it doesn't matter what I write
or how well I can parse out signs and semiotics.

I need
the right chemicals, colors, catalysts—
something to catch your eye in the dark
and make your heart move.

All I have
are paltry words:
they catch no fire,
spread no light,
fizzling out in the darkness
without less bite than the sparklers
children are cautioned against.

If I thought—for a *moment*—
I'd catch your eye? I'd hold on
to every burning word, every flaming scrap
of sodium, blinding white against the darkness.
A pure reaction
waiting to happen;
waiting
to weigh the pain of scorched flesh
and charred spirit.

Your Hand

And yet, it's by myself I stand—
cut off by choice, by will, desire.
In my dream, I hold your hand.

If I called you fairest in the land
would you laugh? I brushed your fire—
and yet, I burned myself. I stand

beside you in my mind. Grand
ambitions make my fancy fickle liar
in my dreams. I hold your hand

in hand in daisy chains, following the band;
camaraderie at its best. Still, my shadow and I conspire...
and yet, it is myself—I. Stand

near me as I, tarnished tongue and trembling hand
keep all afar. You know, you lit the pyre
in the dreams I hold. Your hand

is grace unwound, the moon's command—
an illumination, an obsession that cannot tire.
I'm just—*myself*. I stand:
And in my dream, you hold my hand.

the last spring

last spring
 we sat beneath a fledgling sun
 and watching dewdrops fall
 from petals and stems. the silver ran—
 and so did we, cutting
 across lawns, blood

 racing in our veins. images bleed
 into one another, Kodak smears. spring
 forward, photo finish, cut
 to the chase. fall back—but this time i'll catch you. sun
 drops, stops. feet bounding, sweat tickling
 the small of your back. i'd fall

 for you *anywhere*. i'm still falling—
 still fumbling at the bleeding
 heart you pinned to my sleeve. i ran
 into you the other day, and the spring
 in your step and side-long glance (sparkling like the sun)
 made me skip a-stutter flutter heart (cut

 the film here: *it's the perfect shot*). cut
 to second season, and the ratings fall.
 it's back to cold; no sun,
 no moon, no stars. i want to bleed
 for you, open up and gush, like a spring
 too honest for its own good (*i've never been*). run

 out the clock with all the *could* have (*running
 through my mind for years, you know?*); cut
 the crap and tell you the *would* have (*hope springs
 eternal*) and the *should* have (*i fell
 for you, not the first time but—*). bloody
 fool, fumbling in the dark (*—not the worst time—*). sunny

 disposition aside, you're fucking *brilliant*: sun
 beams sizzling sidewalks. you have to run
 across the tarmac but they *hurt* so good like blood
 filling the vial, the needle, the bandage on the cut.
 (no, i fell,
 i *fall* for you *all* the time). spring

is here again. when you remember me it's sun on dandelions already cut.
i run to you, all smiles, tombstone teeth to your marble—and, running, i fall.
see? i'm still bleeding. the flower from the wound?—it must be spring.

Mirror Sonnet

The sea's a shallow mirror—false, for its
surface, shining, speaks serene deception.
This polished glass may catch the sky's strange fits
while all the while hiding its intention.
So is the face the mirror-mask of mind:
for when *inward* thought drops down to decay
and principles like ivory columns fine
fall, shattered and in ruin, none can say.
So turns the worm within my fevered brain;
it cannot *still* or *wait* or *watch* or *act*
but proffers bouquets redolent with pain,
with sinning and sin's thought. Corruption, that
soul canker, breeds prodigiously in me.
Small wonder, then, I hide what all can see.

Patience

I was wrong from the start.

For too long
I plucked the pretty flowers and threw them
carelessly
into your yard,
blossoms bouncing against your fresh-cut grass.
Posies, pansies,
wands of lavender, wilted rose petals,
dogwood branches in bloom,
trembling orchids,
wreaths of multiflora rose.

Poorly wrought or exquisite,
I laid them at your door,
dog-like,
panting for approval.

But flowers are more conservative.

What self-respecting dandelion goes abroad in search of bees?
Even the lowliest lily is waited on by a host of suitors—
hummingbirds beaux, gypsy moth gentlemen callers
—eager to pollinate, to nip nectar, to share in the sweetness.

My approach has been too bird-like,
I'm too saurian in persistence,
to therapod in my tactics.

I

will

wait. I am—
worth waiting for. I will rest
here, blossoms opening
as and when they will. I will find
the sweetest side-road
and my sweetheart
will choose me
freely.