

And...

In my closet
it is always night.
Even when the fluorescent light hums.
And I wonder how the light looks on the other side,
peeking out through the slightly spread fingers of the walnut door.
I feel as though the whole world is sleeping,
except me.
It is a lonely feeling.
And the air is full of silence,
and the fingertap of laptop keys,
and the shuffling of pages,
and another f***ing paper cut,
and another sleepless night.
And I can't write another line,
because a swarm of bees is chasing away the butterflies.
Exhaustion has settled over me.
The frustrated tears come slowly,
dropping like weighty stones.

The door clicks open.
He is standing there.
I look up.
"It's so late," he says softly,
his hand outstretched.
"Won't you come to bed with me?"
And I am too tired to fight,
so I take his proffered hand.
His thumb wipes away a lingering tear
as he whispers
"I love your sad brown eyes.
Sometimes I think you are most beautiful when you cry."

He kisses me
and we are tongues of flame
dancing in the night.
And the sky, so far past midnight,
is sneaking in through the skylight.
And we are ligaments and moonbones.
We are muscles and we are starfire.
And we are energy and volcano dust and salted skin.
And we are falling.
And the tide is rising.
And morning is coming.
And our names are written in this calligraphy of wanting.
Our names are written in bird song across the quiet dawn.
Daybreak washes over us.
And together we are waiting for dreams to come.

I wish it could always be like this -
these moments when he knows me so perfectly -
but morning comes
and he forgets.

Autumn Leaves

*I can't write the avalanche,
not the way it really looks.
The rush of fear,
the charging onslaught of pristine snow,
a thousand horses pushing forward,
Sabinos and Camarillos,
Arabian whites.*

*I can't write the way it really feels,
the way you look right through me
directly into my soul,
somehow always knowing.*

*I can't write time more slowly,
can't stop the passing of people,
or the changing of seasons.
I can't stop the days bleeding into weeks, to months,
or the suddenness of so many years gone by.*

*I can't write the static friction of wanting, or
the pulsing electricity
in the space
between
where
two hands meet.*

*I can't write the silence of missing you,
or the haunting thickness of your absence.*

*It was never just you.
It was never supposed to be you,
but somehow it has always been only you.*

With you I could see the sunlight in a whisper.

Flame-Licked

You always told me you loved:

The figure 4 I slept in,

arm bent at the elbow, hand lost under head.

My face buried in the soft cotton pillowcase beneath a knotted mass of red hair.

The high arch of my left foot

caressing

the slow curve of my right knee.

But you loved so many things:

Night, crawling like spiders across the face of the Earth.

And the stars, wiping the night dust from their sparkling cider eyes.

And the cicadas, crying, caught in my hair.

I loved:

Your face, covering the street in hot ash.

And your breath, clouding my eyes like frost on morning windows.

And your fingers, tracing the peaks and valleys of my knuckles, the outlines of my small hands.

And everything, moving slowly like the February rain that freezes

midair

as it falls.

You said my name in your slow, provincial way.

And I knew -

I'd never be the same.

I still don't know why I loved you.

Maybe it was the jasmine scenting the Milpitas air.

Or the hummingbirds diving into the bowels of honeysuckles, trying to find some semblance of sweetness.

Maybe I was

looking for

a sunny place

between the clouds.

Together we plunged into the emerald abyss,

Feet first, eyes closed -

searching for Oz.

**I poured out the contents of my heart like clumped sugar from the bowl.
You drew fingerprints on my sun-freckled skin.
My palms kissed spun sand.**

**We were the red balloon and the flaming heart.
You, always floating somewhere above me.
A satellite.
And I, always burning.
Flame-licked.**

I was the skin you shed.

**Your words melted like salted slugs in my mouth.
So cold, I couldn't even taste them
as I swallowed from the blue cup
you left on the counter by the sink.**

Eleven / 13 / Eighty-Six

It was late Spring. This close to summer. The summer of spitting watermelon seeds.
Chinese Fortune gum in orange wrappers and delfa rolls.
Plastic charm necklaces we bought from the ice cream trucks.
Blasting Madonna:

“I fell in love with San Pedro. Warm wind carried on the sea, he called to me”¹

from the silver Sony boom box on LaurieMarie’s front stoop.
Begging our mothers for “just five more minutes” after the street lights came on.

It was the summer I first remember being aware of boys.
My eleven year-old self attracted of the lanky, barely discernible masculinity of their bodies.
The gorgeousness of the awkward angles that define their anatomy
as they carve the curve of an empty in-ground pool
or tailslide along the un-cut curb of a sidewalk vanishing into the melting asphalt.
I always thought it was a shame, how they scratched up the graphics on the undersides of their decks.

That summer was the first I ever remember falling in love.
I fell hard, like a star kicked out of heaven.
He was older.

A mysterious, dark-haired Italian boy with just-the-hint-of-a-mustache-thinking-of-growing and an accent that made my knees embarrassingly unstable.
He said his family came from a border town on the Alps.
Maybe Trentino or Como, maybe Porto Venere.

I was skinny. Weird.
A wholly uninteresting girl,
with bad hair and breast buds decidedly not blooming.
My small hands crept though his chain link fence to steal the plump June bearing strawberries,
growing on the border of Staten Island and Vernazza,
while his mother stood on their stoop yelling:
“Disgraziata sei!!! Potrete uccidere l’erba!”²
at his Gemini brothers breakin’ on the flattened cardboard boxes in their front yard.
The mischievous one, who looked like Balki Bartokomous, winked at me as he responded:
“L’erba è bene Mamma; non ti preoccupare,”³
before dropping down to do the worm.

¹ From the song La Isla Bonita, written by Madonna, Patrick Leonard, and Bruce Gaitsch, and performed by Madonna.

² You disgrace. You’ll kill the grass.

³ The grass is fine, Mamma, don’t worry.

I drowned willingly in the sunset of his café au lait eyes.
I wrote love notes to him in broken Italian.
I played MASH, his name on every line, not caring if we ended up in the shack.
And I waited.
I waited through the teased-out, deadly flammability of Aquanet hair,
through banana clips, stirrup pants, crimping irons, and the Goonies.
I waited through Garbage Pail Kids and Super Mario Brothers, mullets and tails and
Dance Lucky Stars.
Through lace fingerless gloves, Michael Jackson jackets, and mirrored aviators, I waited.

Finally at 13 he found me worthy. All Souls Day, 1986.
Unseasonably warm, though night came early that first November Saturday.
We stood in the remains of his parents' summer garden
surrounded by deep-rooted tomato plants and fig trees bagged for winter.
The air was alive with the aroma of basil and oregano and green peppers embedded in the
dirt.
He stood behind me, his long arms wrapping me in the smell of Italy and fading suntan and
too much Drakkar.
As we stared at the Beaver Moon, he spun me around and kissed me.
A perfect first kiss, drenched in moonlight and waning innocence,
electrified tingling and the exhilarating fear of being caught alone together.

And in that moment we were the coffee grinds and the egg shells and the orange peels
impregnating the damp earth.
We were the rapid, hummingbird beating of our hearts.
We were the plum tomatoes and zucchinis and Italian parsley yet to come.
I lived a thousand lifetimes in the span of that first kiss.
A girl on the verge...

Gravity

She is playing with her pink scarf.
A child's scarf.
Made of crocheted pink yarn.
Pink - the color of innocent love.
Pink - a child's color.
A purer version of red.
Neither lustful nor whorish.
She holds one end in each hand.
Small, pale hands with pink polish.
Pink polish half peeled off of nails.
Nails tainted only by playground dirt.
She twirls, letting her pink scarf slip from one hand.
She twirls, her pink scarf flying freely with her,
following her lead, circling her, protecting her.
Twirling as I once did.
Twirling, as sometimes I still do.
Though I do not now, nor did I ever have a pink scarf.
For minutes that seem like hours I watch this girl.
This girl and her pink scarf, with its tattered edges.
She is almost like me when I was her age.
Thought it was I who was tattered and not my scarf.
She is still innocent.