

The Dark Room

The room is dark, darker than I remember it being, ever. It is as if all lights have been extinguished; not even the glow of a digital clock remains. Or am I still in the dream? Or waking up from the dream - my dead father speaking to me, his voice unfamiliar.

I shift my hips in the darkness and feel Marcus beside me. He has not disappeared after all.

They shimmer,
like stars fallen
to the Earth, they embrace
her dark covering, a cloak
worn to find the passage
from infancy to manhood

fallen down
spitting blood and light
I reach out my hand
to touch, mate
Earth to Star
find them gone, taken

yet they linger
owning some part of me
that longs to go home
offering them shelter
within my womb
pulsing into song,
expulsion
into nothingness

Emerging from the darkness I hear the words emanating through the silence:

It has been a long time...
(almost 17 years to be exact)
...since I've seen or heard from you –
I love you!

There is no meaning to these words spoken by my father; they fall beyond the scope of a reasoning mind. But do I truly possess a reasoning mind? Marcus would likely say I do not.

But Marcus is asleep, his breathing light and quiet at the moment. Is he dreaming too? I reach out, my hand invisible, slithering across the soft cotton sheet, and his skin slides beneath my fingertips. He does not wake. I open my mouth, a cavernous pool of forgotten sounds, memories dripping from my mind through a sieve. My lips close but I force them open again:

I love you.

He does not stir from the dark bed but I hold his hand.

God, it's true – I do love you. Yes, now I have said it, released the words to ripen in the air, to seep into your ears, your eyes, like the early morning sunlight visible beneath the blinds – (only there is no light – where has it gone?) and why does it feel like a poison that will further silence the beating of your reluctant heart?

This love for you engulfs me like a burning bonfire, so hot on my face that I feel my flesh tingling from the imaginary flame, yet it burns so slowly, like embers from a forgotten campfire teasing me with its dim glow, a promise of warmth not received.

I taste you in the earth beneath, lava flows uncontrolled in their undulating movements.

I see the campfire burning, Marcus is playing the guitar, his hair draping across the side of his face as his head bends down toward the wood – shapely wood in his hands, burning dead wood from the forest floor, just beyond the clearing of the cabin. I cannot see his eyes. I turn away from the fire and gaze out into the darkness beyond the glow, finding the outlines of towering trees – oh my dear friends.

I let my eyes return to the fire, to Marcus. It will not be until much later that night, when we turn back the covers of the strange bed and disappear within their warmth, that I will see him. But it will only be a piece of him, his desire. That need, the yearning to possess will flood his

hidden blue eyes and pour over me, capturing me even if I squirm. But I don't wish to escape him; I wait for the moment when we come alive, tear down the barrier and watch it burn. When we awake in the morning it will be there, just as strong and impenetrable as before.

Morning should have arrived but it is still dark. I withdraw my hand from Marcus's arm and turn toward the blackness surrounding me. I reach for my journal on the nightstand and know that I have found it when my fingertips feel the rough texture of the faux leather beneath them. But I cannot write in this darkness.

Listening, I hear a voice.

Father?

I walk into the Kiva; it is enormous. I turn around and see my father. He is dressed in rags. I watch him walk to the center of the Kiva and kneel down. It is unlike him to show such humility and reverence. I stare at him in silence until he looks up and motions me with his hand to come near. The sandy texture of the adobe structure is simultaneously smooth and gritty beneath my feet. I realize that I am barefoot. I move slowly toward the center where my father is still kneeling and he wordlessly invites me to kneel beside him.

What has happened to his voice?

On the ground now I look up to see his face – his eyes betray his mania. He reaches into an unseen pocket of his tattered trousers and pulls out a long shiny knife. He rests the blade against my neck and smiles as he slits my throat. I let him do it.

Do not be sad
my dear one
rise from that seat
head draped above my grave

The Sacred calendar says Hun Cimi – One Death

Do not be sad
my dear one
rise from that seat
head draped above my grave

I attempt to accustom my eyes to the absence of light but I cannot even make out faint lines. Where is the curved footboard of the bed, my dresser topped with jewelry boxes, chains of a multitude of necklaces hanging along the edge of the wall? Where have I left my phone?

Suddenly I need to read the last text I received from Thomas. How long has it been now? I can't recall. But I don't really need the phone, I remember the words.

I really am fine if you think I'm an asshole. I'm not.
Hey, but congrats on the achievement with the book. I'm not a writer, but I admire them.
So cheers anyway lady.

After all those years of believing in the purity and unquestionable beauty of first love...Marcus shifts in the bed, rolling over so he is facing me now...and all these years of believing in last love.

When this life ends I don't want to be the five-year relationship in the middle of another person's bio.

How does one express, with any words, the knowledge that those you love so deeply are the ones who have betrayed you the most?

Though I cannot see his face, I sense a momentary flickering of Marcus's eyelids. Will he awake and sit with me in the darkness now? Talk to me? But I know his eyes are closed again as I hear his breath return to the long inhale followed by the exhale.

I swivel my head and look for a window. Where are the windows? Where is the light? I hear a sound, a low rumbling that emanates from a corner of the room.

Hello?

In the distance the sandstone cliffs are glowing red in the deepening sunset. As I watch the glowing ball descend, I see him, my father. He is walking down the side of the cliff as if suspended from the sun. The sun is setting and my father is coming toward me, coming to get me. The rumbling is becoming louder, echoing across the desert floor. I want to run but my legs are so heavy, my feet suctioned to the earth beneath me. His strides are huge now, every step he takes propels him a mile nearer – any minute now he will be here.

The sun is down. Immediately upon its death the moon has risen, taken its place in the sky, no longer glowing red but a shimmering silver orb emanating a profoundly beautiful light. I know she is here to help me, protect me. I watch my father approach – he has grown to mammoth proportions, a giant causing the earth to shake beneath his feet. I watch as one enormous foot rises in the air above me. She is too late. His foot comes down upon my head.

I flinch and press my nails into the soft mattress beneath me. I peel back the blanket and cautiously place one foot, then another on the floor. I reach out with my hands but cannot find the bed frame. There is nothing to hold on to. Which side of the room am I on?

Panic rises inside my chest and I gasp. I quickly leap and land on the bed, pulling the blanket up to my neck. Marcus stirs momentarily from the commotion. Suddenly I am cold, as if a cool breeze has swept through the room.

In fact, I hear the wind blowing. Or is that a flute?

The radiating sound fills the town square. The old man stands in the center, his long gray hair flowing down his back as he sways gently with the rhythm of his playing. I feel the swelling inside, tears close to the surface of my eyes as I glance at Marcus standing beside me. He has the

oddest look on his face, as if someone has stolen everything he owned and he is now a penniless pauper playing for his supper. His hair too cascades across his shoulders, but his instrument, his guitar sits silent, propped up against a small sycamore tree. I turn back to the old man as the last lines of the song emanate from the flute. I want to stay but Marcus grabs his guitar in one hand and my hand in his other, practically pulling me across the square in the direction of the alley.

I feel small, like I am suddenly 1/16 the size of my former self. I can't see anything but dark shadows looming over me. Fumbling, I reach out and feel for Marcus but he is fast asleep again.

You can't see anything, can you Marcus? And you wouldn't wake up, would you, even if I died, right here beside you?

Thomas couldn't see either.

Slow dances I can do.
Remembering a chance encounter 15 years ago needs a reminder.
Yes! Slow dancing!
A rooftop on the strip on a weekend night.
I would wish for this again.

I pull myself up from the pillow and look out into – nothing. All is shadow.

Soft tinkling sounds, like ice cubes or broken shards of glass.

Hey – who's there?

I am inside a sand pit. I feel like I am swimming as I cross the space, trying to get to the other side. But even though the pit seems shallow, it is long; in fact, I cannot even see to the other side. It goes on and on. Suddenly he is there, my father. He is walking but his feet don't seem to touch the ground, he is levitating, just like Jesus or the Buddha. But he is not Jesus or the

Buddha, he is a phony. I keep trudging forward, my embedded feet only managing to move a few inches each time I take a step. My Father is near me now and I see he holds an inordinately large shovel in his hands. He stops alongside me, his feet hovering above the earth as he begins shoveling the sand on top of me. I try to keep walking but the sand is too heavy, pushing me down. Soon only my head is above ground and I feel the shovel unload more sand on top of me. My Father takes the shovel and pounds the sand down on top of my head. There is no escape.

I am sitting very still now. Marcus shifts in the bed and his arm drapes across my thigh. So warm. Oh, I so need the warmth! I can feel the darkness sucking the heat from my body. I shiver and grasp his limp hand.

The car is moving swiftly on the practically deserted highway. I am sitting in the passenger seat next to Marcus gazing out the window at the flashes of scenery. We have left the desert behind and are now in the mountains. When the moonlight hits the peaks in the distance the snow shines like a magical Christmas tree. I turn toward Marcus – he is silent as usual. His gaze remains fixed on the road in front of us and I pull my sweater around me, as if it could truly protect me from the cold. Perhaps when we arrive in Seattle I will once again hear his voice?

Marcus mumbles something unintelligible in his sleep. I lower my head and place my ear where I heard the syllables uttered. I keep my head in this position for a few more moments but no other sounds come from him. I sit up and stare into the blackness. It is odd how so few words, so few syllables are needed to wreak havoc.

I feel like everything is wrong, I am off track.

It was those words that dropped me into the chasm. I fell down and down and down and into the first conversation with Thomas in fifteen years.

Thoughts...what are those?
I am adrift in a strange sea.
And, oh my God! You
appear. Thoughts???

I hold the purple umbrella over our heads as we stroll down the damp sidewalk downtown. The holiday lights are picturesque, standing out against the drizzly sky. The glowing moon peeks out from behind a cloud that has drifted by. I hold onto Marcus's arm, feel the fabric of his coat, underneath, the firmness of his arm. I turn to speak to him, tell him of the enchanted world I have just now discovered, right here in the middle of the city. He is looking down at his phone, reading a text from someone. I begin to speak, slowly, cautiously. He does not react but begins to type with one hand, a message to the unknown someone. He is not listening. I turn away and pull the umbrella back, letting the rain fall down upon our heads.

Why must the boys always frighten the pigeons away?

Why must the smiling tourists always request a photo overlooking the Sound, a pulse away from the Native men, homeless by the water's edge?

Why can I not fall asleep on the grass and awake speechless, inconceivably empty, needing only to be alone? Why must it always be all or nothing, all sense of life lost before it becomes comprehensible?

Why must the boys always frighten the pigeons away?

Marcus has settled down again on the bed. He doesn't notice my shifting weight as I rotate my head around and around, rocking lightly. Dark.

But then I hear it, an echoing sound. The sound shatters the sheet of darkness enveloping me, yet still I am stuck inside, the echo overtaking my ears. I lean into it.

I am crouching in a small damp space, a cave. I am sad, am beyond sad. I hear the sound of water. It seems so far away. There is nothing before me but a rock wall in every direction I turn. Getting down on my hands and knees I crawl toward an opening several feet away. The hard rock pokes into my knees and the soft pads of my fingers and palms. Finally, my slow movement brings me to the opening in the rock. It is another chamber, even lower and narrower than the one I am in. I slip through the opening and begin to crawl. The space is so tight I can barely move; across the expanse the only thing visible are two small glowing orbs. It is my father. My father's orbs glide in slow motion toward me as I stop crawling, my body disintegrating into streams of water flowing across the floor of the cave.

Ebb and Flow
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 Flow
 Ebb
 and Flow

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Ebb and Flow
 Ebb and Flow

Lightly, because now I don't wish for Marcus to wake up, I lie my head down on the pillow beside him. If I tell him about my father he won't believe me. He will say to me – that's not true.

I close my eyes, shut them tight for thirty seconds then open them again. Still dark, all dark.

The wind is blowing very hard, strange behavior for Seattle, with its subdued patterns – weather, emotions, ships sailing in from Puget Sound laden with cell phones. But this evening I can hear the howling outside the single pane windows of our apartment building. Just a few blocks away the usually quiet water must be rocking and beating the shore with the force of that wind. I want to see the waves, feel the wind blowing me, carrying me down the hill. Quickly I pull on my coat and hat, wrap a scarf around my neck. As I open the front door I almost run into Marcus who is coming in.

Oh!

Marcus takes me by the arm and guides me to the couch. For some reason he wants to sit with me tonight. I watch his face, so sweet and soft, still so boyish even though he is no longer a boy. I too am no longer a girl. I get up, take off my coat, hat, and scarf and go to the kitchen and return with two glasses of wine. He smiles at me from underneath his long lashes and I can't help myself – I smile back.

I am breathing, trying to mimic Marcus's breath as I lie there, awake, beside him. For a moment his breath gets caught and he stops breathing. I reach out my hand carefully, search for his face in the darkness, tap his cheek gently with my fingers. Big inhale breath and his rhythmic pattern returns.

Is it dawn yet?

Thomas believed there was still a dawn.

I am in the same boat

Look, I am waving across the crowded vessel!

The wind has returned.

Is anybody there??? My voice is lost in the wind.

Father?

It is gray and a steady drizzle falls from the sky, colliding with the mist coming off the ocean. The damp cold seeps into the corners of my jacket so I grab the zipper and pull it up to my neck. I gaze out at the ocean churning before me; there is something out there, floating on the water, bobbing like a tombstone on a watery graveyard. I stare into the gray light – it is my father; he has braved the north wind to find me.

I hear his thoughts bobbing on the watery tombstone:

Did you think you could hide from me?

No Father. But I thought if we left the desert then maybe it would all change.

Silly child. Nothing will ever change.

I watch my father drifting slowly into shore. Suddenly the waves pulse and grow tall then fall back. I see my father sitting on top of the giant wave, as tall as a skyscraper on the ocean. I am awestruck, immobilized, staring as the wave rushes toward me, enveloping me in its green blue cocoon. I watch as my father consumes me.

He climbs the cliff side clinging to
 roots and rocks and I too
 ascend with
 solitary faith
 beside me, he a few steps
 above, sitting
 on the ledge
 waiting, to build me a mansion
 of tent sized
 proportions
 above us the pines shine.

There is no time beyond this spell
 as dirt cakes my hands, buries
 beneath my nails,
 all is
 wet in this forest of rain
 clouds draping
 everything blue
 and green, moss
 springing back from the
 momentary footfall.

 I am lost without
 superb concentration
 the give and take of
 the coming
 then retreating tide,
 the cool damp
 earth beneath me
 that sense of
 destiny returning.

Inside the winds, the water
 ripples, dipping
 into the light
 light dream, that is
 life –
 this life, I call my own
 nothing more than
 a moment
 fortune's hand on my
 muddy thighs
 I feel it
 inside me, churning
 the waters of the effervescent dream.

There is no darkness There is no room. There is no Marcus. There is no me.