

Someone Else Existing

Carneades

"Infinitely gentle, infinitely suffering."

- TS Eliot

It's almost 9 in the morning and I'm on the bus.

A balding man in front of me
with headphones on
bites his thumb and
presses his head
against the window.

Something in me knows
he's searching for a coffee-
that he fell asleep last night
to the screechy low hum
of his ten year old daughter
learning to play the cello.
That he's working overtime
and can't go on the fishing trip
with his college buddies next weekend.
That his wife rolled over with the sheets
leaving him naked and cold.

He fell into the same trap I did:
that life is a filing system
and we all have a place.
These places leave us fighting
for a spot on the plank of Carneades,
and some of us are drowning

so we break, melting
carefully into a puddle of paint
for hopefully an artist to find,
remaking our perceptions.

It sometimes seems like
we've been painted back together
with colors we wouldn't have chosen,
leaving us trembling
in some unoccupied corner.

Lying softly

*I love all women. Women are sublime beings. I love all of it: their eyes,
their noses, their bodies.*

-Patrick Demarchelier

There's a girl lying on a couch in this apartment,
hair flowing over the edge of the arm rest
fingers tracing the soft top of a white carpet
legs curling over the the top of the couch
eyes closing briefly every few moments

and he tells her to be just as she is

but when the camera shutters,
she thinks of Kate Moss
strung out and sleeping in
Calvin Klein's, so Patrick could
capture all the right parts of her body
and none of the wrong ones.

It's not much different, really,
than Eve
lying softly in Eden
while He paints her,
unable to move,
or object.

An Inspiration

I've stopped talking to you.
My friends said out of sight out of mind
and you can't be in my sight
so why have you on my mind
although it seems that that
is where you've always been
which means not talking
hasn't really cured anything;

sometimes when I'm high and alone
I think about you. I wonder
what you're thinking about
I wonder what you think of me
I wonder what you think I think of you
and if you knew what I think (fully)
if that could change your mind.

The you that wonders back,
the one I think is in my head,
loves me still. He thinks of me often.
Even if I'm not perfect, I am to him,
not for any good reason, other than
he's romanticized me into a version of me
he wants and I like being her.

From what you've told me you're much less
complicated and in love with me
than I've made you out to be. Once you were,
maybe you might be. At worst, I made up
all your best qualities in my head, at best,
you're still you and I forgot why that's beautiful,
which is either because I lack imagination, or your life

is domestic and rigid and I briefly found that comforting.

I'll keep writing you poems, not the ones anyone asks for;
you're less than a character, trapped between words,
an inspiration for a feeling, not even the ones you wanted.

Arachne

Weavers aren't made, they are born,
eternally cursed with fingers
that won't stop weaving.

It's hard to say who the best weavers are,
I've found that the best have simply
been proclaimed as such, by themselves,
or other weavers.

But weavers are arrogant, too,
if you asked them, they'd say it's me,
position my art as the center of humanity,
take my fingers as a version of my heart,
I'll let you eat them.

We should have learned from Arachne,
who tickles our arms in our sleep,
crawls into open, heaving mouths
for safe haven. She's capricious,
all we would need to defeat her
is the softest part of our thumb,
but her simple existence reminds us
what being a weaver has always meant:

to lay traps and wait for people to step in them.

If only we made her an offering
roaches or mudwigs or mosquitos
something crunchy
to get stuck between her teeth
leave her distracted
until she comes hunting again.

Ashes

At the end of each day,
I get in the shower,
and use my unbroken fingernails
to scrape the rest of the day
from my scalp and my body.

The hot water brushes me,
out the drain,
through the pipes,
and to the ocean,
where my DNA
floats like flakes,
to be eaten by groupers
or maybe something else,
but I still stand in the shower,
and think about groupers,
and how they nibble.

When I get out of the shower,
I put on lotion with lavender,
to make my nose ignore the smell
of my skin slowly flaking
off my body, and
as I age the skin flakes more
and I can see the indentations
of where I previously grew,
through the lines
developing outside my eyes,
and next to a smile I muster when
I look in the mirror and
think about someone who
tells me they like how blonde I am now;

My blonde hairs fall out more
and more each day,
from the bleach,
and the shampoo,
and the showers,
and they float through the air,
landing on the jacket of a balding man
who dusts it from his shoulder
as the notion of someone else
existing beyond him-
and he's right to.

When my body is but flakes, please,
spread my ashes
in the San Francisco Bay,
to float next to the kelp,
and be eaten by the urchins,
then the otters.