

January 12th, 2016

Dim Lighting

I.

Stained snow presses against our window,
light paw-prints stamp where the cat walked
an hour ago. "He'll come back", I assure you,
but I'm not sure he will. "It's too cold for him out there."

You're distant, beside me, back turned to the edge
of our white couch. You won't stop sighing at
dissonant documentaries. Swimming in small pools of water,
a nursery below reflected trees as sentries.

Swimming in community for seven years
where their mothers did before them.

Your feet are freezing, arched over my knees, dangling,
I pull the cross-stitched blanket, overwhelmed by the feeling.

You kiss me on the hand and check your phone again.

I start to fall asleep. The narrator soothes our
ice-cold afternoon, "*swimming from shore,*
fluorescent fins are seen trailing silhouettes..."

The sharks spread out. Fish they hope they'll catch are swimming
to the open sea. "Do you want to go with me?"

You look up, and I can tell you mean it.

“Let’s start travelling.”

The screen wants to know if we’re “still watching,”
and I can’t explain it, but suddenly I’m sick to my stomach.

We bundled up and braved the cold
“for some air” to talk of travel and lemon sharks.

II.

The yard across from us still had a manger set glowing
by their door. My hands went numb immediately, but I held yours.
You talked of college debts and that night you kissed a stranger
I hated that story, but the curb cut your words for me. You stopped short.

Three houses down the street, across our own,
screams swirled into the curse of a sky.
The clouds never looked darker.
Sounds howled down our road to that long grey house.

They stopped just short of our own and I heard my ringtone. Jacob was calling.
Ben Howard’s *Small Things* started playing in my pocket,
and you said the guitar riff was fitting. The sirens stuck to your words.
They loaded a body onto a padded platter and slid him in the back.

He was wrapped in white cloth and moaning. When they shut
the doors behind him in the glow of his
street light, he saw his own blood dripping. We saw it too.
When that ambulance started singing again, we were left

with our lives wondering what we could do on someone else's last night.

The cat never came back. We got two tickets for June.

III.

That night, you asked me when I first realized I was going to die,

and I told you I didn't know. I was nine. Sent down a side road

at the campsite we were staying with my dad's side.

Uncle Bill gave me some dishes to wash by the grill, I threw the bag

over my shoulder as I walked there. The old rusty sink spit its cold drink

all over my hands. They shook in the wind. Even then, I had talked

about death, but we never properly met. There was something

about that night, because the boy who laughed at his

great-grandmother's funeral realized he wasn't terribly far behind.

IV.

I don't always answer honestly because I love you, but I don't

always trust you. Sometimes, if let out, I think my words would escape you

or make you leave, so I keep them bound tight in loose-leaf. Stacks

of rambles and journal entries, by me and to me, that I'll never read.

I used to wonder why my favorite writers

fought depression and then, after heartbreak

my pen seemed to press deeper for words

I couldn't find myself. Fighting the pitch-black winter nights

as I tried to describe them.

“Do you pity me?”

“Yes, I do,” she answered.

“Then I love you.” –William Blake

April 13th, 2016

Day Of

Pity painted affection, she glazed his nails with her coating,

pale purple, and he leaned his head against hers

until their hair tangled together in a dirty blonde cluster.

Closer than ever, as the nails began to dry, she avoided their reflection.

Stepping outside didn't stop the appetite.

In her light blue skirt, she was dressed for the confession.

One half-tucked-in-mess, he devoured the mention of his name in the downpour.

He wanted more, and she gave it to him.

He ran his thumb over her wet lips and she shuddered.

“I shouldn't have done that.”

“*We* shouldn't have done that,” he corrected her.

And they did it again.

June 16th, 2016

One in the Crowd

Beets and pistachio's blend at the end of the bowl,
side of cherry tomatoes topped at this green salad in Marrakech.
I refuse, but they hold it to my face and there's not much left to do.
It's delicious. And they told me heartbreak couldn't taste food.
Market streets are bare before dusk, bare feet run through us,
over a cheaply made stool. Baskets of fruits and nuts pass long tables.
Henna artists trace lines from side to side like the snakes that rock by
the charmers behind them, and I stare. The square transforms.

I'm hours from our resort, where you intend to stay until Monday,
because we were both too stubborn to call it off, until it was too late.
"I'll see you at the airport," you'd say, and I'd grit my teeth
until you walked away. You're good at that.

The shop keeper, Ahmed, pours thin pasta into a soup with
lamb shavings and chick-peas. Sweet dates are served beside them.
A passing motorbike blinds me as spirited marketers offer me salted snails.
They convince me their tent, no. 74, was put up just for me.

I sit back with fresh squeezed orange juice,
watching steam come off their pans. Ahmed speaks English,
tells me his name means "most worthy" and that's why he runs the shop.
His wife's name (Hasan) means beautiful, and he says it fits her. I believe him.
At 7:00 he laughs and walks home. I watch his workers work their hands slowly
turning the roll of lamb. Another night in their home, another night they've fed me.

"I just need space." I think you've had plenty.

We came to this country together, and we'll leave it the same way,
and I hate it. I hate that the words I needed to say finally came
when you were miles away. I wrote them down and hold them beside me,
just in case they help. My notebook keeps filling with scents, imagery, memories,
but the cover is ripped. You're probably snorkeling, making friends, and
looking for lemon fish. Your face turned red when they said there
are no sharks in Morocco. Just fossils. I'll probably stay in these streets
until their stores close. So full it feels empty where nobody knows me, then
two women catch my sight as they're walking away.

Draping down, dark hair tries tracing covered legs,
familiar shapes, curve to the side of your ears.
But their hair is not yours. Blurs wave me by in the street,
like they're keeping me from somewhere I'm going.
I feel a slight breeze and think of your hatred for snow, and the cold.
Now, in this heat, I wonder how long you might sit with me
before explaining your family was waiting and you had to go.
The sun tries to soothe me, gives up, and goes home.
I scrape the side of my bowl, I savor the cold broth.

Each flavor fights for attention as strangers yell past me to loved ones
across the street. More file into the square, and the dangling tent-lights
seem to take a color of their own, their shades taking the place of a deliberate dusk.

Even in the darkness I find many sun-stained faces, and in all of these places, I'll keep looking for yours.

Departure

June 26th, 2018

Strangers shuffle down stilled aisles, exchanging quick kindnesses,
loading overhead bins and stopping short of their seats.

A business man is lost in a black-lined dress and a child is lost
in the fog through the window. I pretend to know their place.

Two childhood friends are seated together without notice,
and one of them can't place the face, but will have
the whole flight to figure out its name. They're both going to
the same funeral, and neither of them have cried yet.

Gritting her teeth, a woman in her thirties won't sit
until she's told. Her small diamond necklace disappears
below her neckline, shaking as she taps her feet.
She's waiting on a text that isn't coming.

A couple sits in first class seats they couldn't afford,
working out their plan for all the places they'll eat
when they land. They have eighty-three dollars
between them both, and they're going to spend it in Nashville.

A twenty-two-year-old woman asks to be moved
by someone in the Navy to thank him for his service.

They share courage and numbers before the wheels
leave the runway. He's nervous.

The girl to my left holds her white pillow against
her sunburnt skin: all she smells is hotels.

The man to my right is reading Hitchens'
"God is not great" and wondering if it's true.

Somewhere near the back, we're sitting there
refusing to speak, shoulders touching,
hearts probably getting colder.
You want the window seat, so I let you switch with me.

A flight attendant named Sophie raises her voice to make sure
headphones hear her, and we all agree to the responsibility of the exit row.
She waves a pamphlet as she marches to the back. Several whisper about her.
the plane stirs. Cold air blows over closed eyes and sighs
as belts are buckled and protocol drones through the speakers.

Our plane hums like a radiator working overtime and the flaps on the fold start to rise.
The binding of the planes creak against the blow of the wind as if it was going to cave in.
Several passengers think it just might, some fearful, some fantasizing,
all going the same way for different reasons, ready to fly.

Dear Gi-Gi,

inside, my aunts and uncles step over your boxes,
each claiming the oak hutch was theirs.

If I'm honest, I hope we get it, but mom is silent and so am I.

Grandpa is sitting in the corner, telling a story we've already heard before.

Remember when I asked you what was floating through
your living room? Those dust-mites are still here,
apologetically bumping into one another,
but the light cuts clear through, without permission.

I hold one of your glass birds to my side, light blue.

The one you always put in the front of the tree.

"Make sure we can see it!"

you hollered from the kitchen, taking out another coffee cake.

I place another Andes mint in my mouth,
mixing memories,
and while they're dissolving
small stone stares lead me away from mixed company.

Outside, fluorescent lights stare over me
from your garage. The lights shine through
raindrops dripping down side-gutters,
and onto your tangled water-hose. I try to un-knot it.

I let it go, knotted and wrapped around itself,
flopped over a small stack of bricks, turning by the grass,
reaching for the road. I kneel by the curb alone.
Your white Pontiac glows in the rain.

I thought the sun was done for the day,
but by the mailbox,
through your windshield,
I still see some light coming through.

As the water drips back into the side of the hose
it used to flow from, I admit how much you're missed,
wondering when you realized you were getting old.
I'm sorry I laughed at your funeral.