

Grandmother Chic

My wig is red, shoulder-length...
...Grammy's is a cape
of long, black curls
 that lick her hips
When I hold
- her porous bicep -
lean - into the salon,
& shout...

"Get *these* bangs out
of my sight, Shirley!"
 The hairdressers rouse.
 "These G.D. curls are driving me
bat-shit, Monica." ... Grammy yells,
 then into my hair
covered ear she chuckles -
 "I *thought* we'd need
an appointment - thanks for
 doing this with me."

I nod & tuck her V-neck
 over the IV needle
 taped to her chest.

In our chairs -
 we are draped
in black gowns. "These...*ends*...
are so split...I could die,"

I say as the hairdresser
 sprays & combs Grammy's
ringlets, parting the silky hair
 to reveal pelican wing
 shoulder blades.

Grammy says,
 "It wasn't
this way when we were
growing up." Fake hair
 dashes the tile.
"I mean, Las Vegas? People didn't

just used to...
 shoot each other..."

Her eyes buzz
inside the tall mirror. "I feel bad
- for you kids - I mean,
my grandson, Cole..."
 "Please, *Grammy*, not today,
for the love of God
 - it's Nicole," I say
with a smirk.

The hairdresser's fingers press
into Grammy's crown, pulling -
springing - French braids tight.
 "You're too much,"
 Grammy sighs.

Earthshine

His heart spills onto his Nikes.

If he doesn't tell her, *I want to kiss you*,
he will puke on the steering wheel.

She laughs and says,
"I'm old fashioned.
I've got to be sure."

He scans her black choker,
jade rings, purple yoga pants.
As her eyes hold him,
he searches for an angle to despise.

It is the ghost he knows
he can play so well -
shriveling into one
final conversation.

He bites his lip
& faces the road.

He will not survive
in this car much longer.

When he pulls
into the parking lot,
he watches her exit
& stand on the curb.

"Are you going to be mad
at me if I don't kiss you?" she says.

"Nah, it's cool" he laughs,
"I kinda like it."

She flashes
her high school
superlative - *Best Smile* -
then turns,
hair brushing tailbone

as she disappears
through glass.

He looks down
at the passenger seat.
She forgot her gloves.

He hesitates,
then slips them on,
stretching the cotton -
he touches his lips -

The scent of
burnt marijuana & lavender
raids his nostrils & its beauty
seeps into his lungs
like a long glowing
sip of radium
& destroys him.

A Lousy Pack of Smokes

The cement shoes fit Marty well,
the bucket filled up
to his plump calves with concrete.

He sits, gagged and bound
to a wooden chair, in a shack
just off the oil barge docks,

His own sock balled up in his mouth,
held in by a slice of duct tape.
Marty draws hot breaths from his nostrils.

Three thugs carry him out
of the office on the chair.
The air is muggy. Close. I-95 echoes
the dull drone of snapping rubber.

The thugs slam Marty down
at the edge of the dock and cut
the rope around his waist.

Marty stands,
facing the indigo bay.
He tilts to-and-fro
like a buoy bell in the waves.

The men take turns prodding
the bucket with steel rakes,

One by one,
inching him towards the drop off.
Marty looks into the water & sees
No reflection.

As the bucket leans forward
he gags on his sock
& slips off of the wet dock.

Heavy. He falls
& plows into the depths.

The bucket pulls,
his knees break

Then collapse on the sea floor
summoning a pale purple
mushroom cloud of muck.

His head pulses.
He opens his eyes
& rips the tape off,
coughs up the swelling sock.

It hovers like a curious jellyfish.

He thinks of his girlfriend, Cynthia.

Earlier today,
Marty climbed up on the garbage
bin inside of their garage

To compact the trash
bags so he could close the lid
when she walked right past him
& hopped into her violet Accord.

Marty wobbled atop
the crunching rubbish,
& watched her

Red ponytail as she hit
the A/C & rolled the windows up.

Marty called, "Cynth, grab me cigarettes!"
he didn't flinch. She just turned her head,
backed out of the driveway
and took off up the street.

He wondered if she had heard him.
It seemed almost impossible that she hadn't.
That she would pretend.

His lungs beg him to let go.

Alone

My girlfriend is a Chinese parade dragon.
She would not like that. We are currently
& perpetually preparing for guests who
never arrive. *That's a good idea, babe.*
I shouldn't have push notifications for Tinder.
What's that, babe? Me neither. They're
so fake. She really is great, though. We met ...
oh ... I don't actually remember when,
I guess it's been that long. We're still young.
She is anyway. I've got to remind myself that.
Hey, Cole. Take it easy, we've got plenty of time.
I'm just excited is all. I don't want this one
to get away from me. Hell, if it wasn't for her -
yup. Love you too, babe - I'd probably be dead,
or in awful shape. She's a vegetarian. Honestly,
I've never seen her eat. She just stares at the -
what? No thanks. Anyway, last time we "took
a break," I was a mess and I didn't hear from her
for weeks. Which means that she was doing better
than me. That's why I don't fool around
with other girls anymore. You never know. She'd
probably be in one of those passing cars. *Watching.*

The Birds & (No) Bees

A snow globe sits
on the kitchen table.

With two hands
a child lifts it up,
shakes it violently
beside his ear,
sets it down
& watches the blizzard
bury the tiny cabin.

As he grows old
the flakes will become
stagnant,
melting into
a grey sludge at the base.

But he can always buy a new one.

& one day
he will show
his children how to turn
a snow globe upside down,
stare in wonder,

Then replace it,
year,
after year.