

-10 degrees, Montréal in January

Walk me home 9pm  
bones midnightheavy

but if you'll turn off Saint-Laurent  
let our steps waver  
bootfalls lighten  
streetlamp halos thaw

this shared vapor  
    our breath  
        the mist of maybe  
            tickling our tongues

        thank you  
    for the beer  
    warm hand  
your pocket

lips slow-moving deliberate in each  
press, each oh, each hum  
the only words worth whispering.

Tilt the mothermade pompom of your hat  
    toward mine so when I rest my head  
on your shoulder our fibers mingle,  
    dance with each other above us like  
        eyestalks of amorous snails who know  
                                    what they want

who sink into primordial moss  
squeeze the dampness of green  
                            of please  
                                and yes  
                                and yes

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A face close to mine

I remember a teal thong  
bikini and my cheeks  
whiter than Oahu's finest sand  
beckoning the sun's kiss until it burned.

I remember a sarong  
colors of scarlet macaw slung  
over sunburns and shorelines, across  
continents and time zones.

I remember a silver bellybutton ring  
a gecko peeking  
head up and pressing toes deep  
into flesh whenever I paddled over a break.

I remember a little black dress I pulled  
over my head and onto the bare inner branch  
of a lush tahinu tree one night  
when the beach was breezy and I thought we were alone;

I remember another little black dress—borrowed  
for the occasion—its satin  
ruching around my hips  
          legs crossed on    industrial beige  
carpet    left        imprints on my calves, then  
          a Salvation Army blanket    a    twin bed

I remember the shade  
of purple eyeshadow (*asphyxia*)  
          how    flecks        fell  
across    cheeks    pillowcase    any face close to mine

I remember a hand big enough to wrap all  
around a wide-mouthed jar        roving  
          black satin of that  
dress, holding        as fingertips        and lips  
whispered

I remember him  
pressing    terms    his warmth  
into        a little black        not mine  
I don't remember saying

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That porcelain fall

What did we have?  
Almost—you and me  
almost that time

What did we almost have that time by the lake  
that time by the lake in the summer  
almost fall that time I forgot my bikini?

That time I forgot my bikini  
I forgot and I wore underwear  
that summer almost fall  
I wore black underwear in the lake  
that time I stood in the lake in my underwear waving  
almost falling that time  
waving, almost slipping away from you

Slipping barefoot on slick stones under water  
I waved bare soles on stones in the lake  
waved to you on shore that time  
to you in your shorts watching me in the lake  
that time I almost slipped black  
underwear under glare  
waving to you on shore in your shorts  
sun slipping off my shoulders into the water  
damp fabric slipping  
I waved to you

I looked over my shoulder in the lake  
wavered in cool water underwear  
glimpsed over shoulder and waved

What did we almost have that time?

Were we almost in the sun together  
that time the sun the water  
together that time on the dock?

I forget—that time on top of the water  
reflecting sun and you in your shorts  
and me dripping dry reflecting  
that time on the dock on the lake we shared  
sun the dock  
that time we closed our eyes in the sun and warmed the dock together

did we wave to him?

No—

That time by the lake when I forgot my bikini  
I forgot wore underwear next to him in the lake  
climbed boulders that time in our underwear warmed in the sun  
wavered on the lake next to him  
that summer almost fall time  
I turned over my shoulder saw you  
your shorts on the shore I saw  
next to him in my underwear

That time I wavered in the lake next to him  
splashing shoulders under the worn glare of September sun  
warm that time in the lake in our underwear  
worn in the water squinting at sun  
that time our eyelashes dripped water on reflections  
our likenesses wavered in the lake that time  
eyelashes dripped water over cheeks lips  
that time we splashed and scattered ripples  
me slipping next to him in the sun  
scattered ripples straight to shore

That time under September sun almost fall  
shoulder to shoulder in the paddleboat that time  
on the lake in the paddleboat next to him  
that time I held a porcelain teacup in the paddleboat  
a porcelain teacup of hot hot coffee  
I pedaled fresh water holding hot coffee in my right hand  
wandering next to him that time in the paddleboat on the lake  
that time morning glare glinted off lake  
caught grey eyes and grazed me wondering  
next to him holding  
me holding hot porcelain coffee

That time he held a porcelain teacup of coffee  
his left hand cupping coffee in the sun right slipping  
fresh shadow on my knee on the water  
we grazed the surface that time in the paddleboat I forgot  
my bikini and the shore that summer  
almost fall his hand on my knee sun on lake

That time we sipped black coffee together and forgot to wave to you.

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Kristina

Follow the trail  
pheromone-drunk ants  
to the sweetest buds.

Watch  
blossoms becoming. Witness  
the disrobing, the plumping; wait;  
the most voluminous baring, the pinnacle  
of opening, the peony rejoicing!  
*—do you hear it?*

Last exalted breath  
unfurling before petals curl

*Do you hear the flower dying?*

We stopped talking,  
she & I used to  
nibble saltines between classes,  
scribble notes to one another  
over milky plastic sleeves  
*I missed you yesterday.*

I found our trail:  
letters photos  
scent lines to sustenance  
she doesn't recall,  
sated in her nest,  
no thirst lingering.

*What is the sound of nectar drying?*

Tune to the frequency of ants:

busy traipsing

between peony buds;

don't notice

darkening scenery:

petal after petal browning,

collecting

on the kitchen table beneath.

What I mean to say is, peonies dry on their own time.

I left home for this

I left home and the train stalled out at the Canadian border. Not where the patrol agents clomp those metal stairs & work their way through each car. Quickening pulses of stoners & students. In the nothing but snow, could be Siberia. I've never had a desire to learn Russian, or go to Russia, or fuck a Russian. I baked a flourless chocolate cake for Ben's birthday that year. I cut a stencil out of lime green cardstock & sifted powdered sugar over it. The sugar BEN melted long before we arrived at the brewery that makes the apricot wheat ale to listen to a band whose album was called "How To Have Sex With Canadians." I was already doing that & didn't learn anything from the album, but the music was good. Ben kissed me in the street one night & I stopped shivering. The next day he asked to meet for coffee so he could say he wasn't interested. I don't remember if that was before or after the cake, but I bet it was after.

Once I took the train to Montréal with Rory from home. He wanted to marry me, & one winter we drank frozen margaritas with his dad and his brother in the hot tub. Their beards & my ponytail all froze.

Not too long after that train ride together, I fucked a Canadian instead of Skyping Rory.

I don't think of Canadians, or cakes, or trains when I listen to that album. It's all cornfields and stars.