

1 Babies and Young Lovers

Babies and young lovers
kiss in much the same way.
Open mouthed
receiving
full of love
and willing to
take in everything.
When does the face seal up
in a manner to
stop the flow
of love and knowledge,
vulnerability and tenderness?
Why do we become guarded, wary,
timid and judgmental?
We begin life,
love
and lust
with submission,
rolling onto our backs,
exposing the soft flesh of our bellies.
Then we turn to jade,
slowly,
a process that involves betrayal,
mistrust,
little murders
and colored lies.
We die,
tightlipped,
underwhelmed, secrets buried;
our goodness tied up in old photos,
winners' ribbons,
perfume tainted with age.

2 The Fruits of Life

Bouts-Rimes constructed anagrammatically from Shakespeare's *The Silken Tent*. My end words are: rage, doom, age, tomb, sighs, breast, thighs, west, mad, blues, plaid, shoes, fail, mail.

My skin betrays me in its apathetic rage
While I face my future with a sense of doom
I cannot deny although I detest my age,
I'll hold beyond arm's length the sight of tomb;
Though witness conceited youth with heaving sighs
And those I nurtured at now withered breast,
Weary sit with elbows propped on tired thighs;
Watch while autumn sun drops in the west.
Some think and perhaps are right that I am mad
But I think suffer from a simple case of blues;
Cast away all things laced, buttoned and plaid,
Shuffle to meet you in my orthopedic shoes.
Make one thing clear, Ponce de Leon must not fail
To send me drops of elixir in the mail.

3 I Am White

I am white.

You are also white.

But you have a palette of other colors I do not have.

We both come from Mother Africa but you have the beautiful genes that document your claim. Mine have been washed away over decades, centuries, travels and time.

Danish butter rolls through our veins, you and me, and you also have Norwegian, making you more of a Viking than I.

Your skin is the color of honey... well made bread... fine sand, ground to softness by tides controlled by the moon.

My skin is old now but when I was younger, my skin was taut and inflexible. Now it gives you something to tease me with.

You were born blue. Your eyes were black like the depths of an underworld cave, and sparkling like an ancient fire. You turned pink within moments after your entrance and later, you began to take on the hues of an Egyptian Queen.

We are Cherokee, you a little more than I, making you braver, more stealthy and able to lean into the wind.

We are French, and English and maybe a wee Irish and German. We are many colors, shapes and sizes.

In our bones, we have the ability to break chains, sail tall ships, write ghazals of love, wipe tears off the face of defeat, leap in the name of victory, count stars and follow comets.

We are connected, like a fragile feather to a wing.

We are the threads of a tapestry and we are here to protect the colors.

4 I Saw a Friend of Yours Today

I saw a friend of yours today;
He called to me across the way.
He doesn't know my real name
But I answered just the same.
It wasn't 'til I walked away
That I thought of what to say.
Isn't that the way it goes?
When caught up in surprise hellos.
I wonder: what with good intention
If he will think to mention
That he saw your old friend today
And called out across the way.
You'll know it's truly me he saw.
He said my name with his usual awe;
The cryptic name that you once used
So you couldn't be accused
Of knowing what I'm really called
That was simply not allowed.
I could have said to say hello
But then I thought of long ago;
The way in which we said goodbye,
And so it was I could not lie.
Goodwill greetings I could not send
Brought to you innocently by your friend.
Let him say he called my name
And then perhaps he'll also claim
That I am well and looked good, too
And did not say hello to you.

5 The Secret Life of Jasmin García Guadalupe

Halfway down the steps close to the church
behind the *mercería*
where she bought thread in late afternoon
after she tells *papi* her stockings need mending,
Jasmin García Guadalupe
spreads her skirt into a fan,
folds it across her behind
first left, then right,
this for a little cushion
keeps her tender skin
from the dusty, cracked cement.

Her lips gather the corner of one small plastic bag
filled with water, nectar, *jarabe*,
sucks like a baby.

Leans her cheek on warm rough wall
watches buses rumble below,
going places she will never know.
Jasmin García Guadalupe
dreams of a seat
in the window
of the big blue bus...
Jesus painted on the back
arms spread wide
oversized palms
with rusty centers.
Jasmin would say
if anyone asked her
that the Bus Jesus says
“Why follow me?”
eyes rolled up to heaven
oily black smoke blowing out his feet.

Lovers steal kisses in shadows;
Señora Diego leans out her window, pulls at her moustache;
niños plucking mangos over a broken fence...
juice runs down their chins, between fingers,
laughing, cussing, shoving, “*Ánimo!*”

Ignacio makes the knees of Jasmin García Guadalupe tremble;
bent weary, he comes up the stairs,
work shirt thrown over shoulder
dangling from wiry hanger
he keeps it spotless 'til he gets to the sizzling café.
Ignacio's undershirt with soaking armpits
so white the sun lives in it.

He comes to where the girl sits
whose father would like to kill him
and stops to find his breath.

“You are the delicious peach.
I think to sink my teeth into your skin.
I think to lick your seed.”

Ignacio passes,
Jasmin shivers,
church bells clang.