

Window Shopping

Whether or not we ordered the same cup of coffee
in two different ways or punctured the skin
of a ripened fig with two separate nails
to unlock the jewels clasped inside,
on that Saturday afternoon in late March
we loved each other over the forced majesty
of charcuterie plates wondering where their hearts went,
valentines even the sort of people
who talk about eating kumquats,
standing in line to buy kumquats, leave behind,
always excusing life's bloody things.
The butcher tells us on Tuesdays he slices open a pig,
unfurling a roll of pink silk to expose the puzzle beneath.
The Sturm und Drang of his tattoos pitch and yaw
as he sharpens a knife I imagine plunging into you
in front of that Sylvia Plath mural we passed.
I once saw a bell jar descend over a village scene,
Swiss Christmas, reindeer lawn, ribbon candy
tripping on its own psychedelic stripes.
You replaced my dream of either skiing the Alps
or becoming the next Sylvia Plath,
who even wanted to die each spring, forgetting
how with Ted Hughes at Court Green
she once churned among the butter of daffodils.
You never need to pick me flowers or write poems
when your close body makes me forget my words
and what happened to all the boys in school
who thought kumquats were obscene
and W.C. Fields beckoning his "little kumquat"
to him, the newest and youngest blonde girl
unlocking more puzzles on the silver screen
while I wait to cut open and climb inside of you.
It is more than wanting to know your view of things,
what you stand in line to eat,
how to erase the times you shared crackers and cheese
in another woman's picnic scene,
how she understood the provenance of gourmet eating
while miles away from both of you
I sharpened the edge of my lonely knife
and waited to start the kind of romance
that does not need a plate of figs and honey
or you dipping a finger in her empty wine glass
to mark that one sweet spot that will never wash clean.

Having a Gelato with You

is maybe what Frank O'Hara really meant
because these years sitting across from you
have made me rupture with presumptuousness.
People like summer because for a few months
they no longer smell death tying itself into their shoes.
The busses run without incident. People say,
Well, Goddamn! only to compliment a perfected belly flop
or the way daisies press themselves between novel pages
like Prom corsages, if Prom meant watching bugs
line up on picnic blankets, that forgotten smear of deviled egg
harnessing enough good cheer to last until winter.
I love to kiss you until I forget winter exists.
Even your tongue, cold from scoops
of pistachio or spearmint, asks me
to mouth the words, "summer dress."
I want you to follow me to our hotel like we just met
and there will never be anything on television
better than watching me brush my teeth
and be extra quiet when I spit.
Having a gelato with you lets me catalog the way
your eyebrows scuttle across your face but never overlap.
You order steaks with that red ribbon middle,
turning blood into a gift more than a predicament.
I want to memorize each of your innumerable facts.
You like museums, so I pretend to like museums
though even in Paris they seemed nothing but dead.
Around you I am glad the way kids are glad
the Easter bunny never forgets cheap candy
tastes better hidden in grass and Mona Lisa
looks better in photographs. Having a gelato with you
is a portrait with your tiny spoon and cup.
Is this how you looked as a baby? I never think about babies
unless I am around your pinked coin face.
I swallow chocolate and wish you could have seen me
once stalk these streets in my plaid 90's dress
when ice cream meant a cherry on top,
the girl from Twin Peaks who could tie the stem in a knot
and make everyone dream of her snowy skin,
even in summer when the Portland boys got me alone,
disappointed my tongue never learned that trick.
Having a gelato with you is knowing you will say
all the things even men in fairytales forget.
*It is okay if your feet are too big.
Who needs that stupid glass shoe?*

Having a gelato with you makes me want to call you art.
No museum means more, though I know
what you will say when we see lilies behind our eyes,
our impressions of sloppy, waterlogged stars,
that French Braille of paint.
Before we met I sat on a bench in front of my first Monet
and held my breath. I can't remember if I really cried
at all that blue like I said,
but having a gelato with you makes me understand
that if we opened our eyes at the very same time
there would be something more than tears.

Room Service

I have never asked if your wife knows
how we always order dessert,
concoctions of chocolate or caramel,
butterflied sponge cake cut soft on the bias
yielding to the urgency of your mouth
the way I imagine you unzipping my dress with your teeth.
I wonder if I might tell you, in the hotel above where we sit,
to use your hands instead,
that a husband and a father is not meant
to follow me upstairs like the beginning of a foreign film
where the leading man is really a woman
and the flowers symbolize anything but flowers.
No one knows how I once danced with a man upstairs,
a party in a suite, both of us moving closer
than when lovers joke about being *thisclose*,
my summer dress breezing around his body,
heat steaming between my legs as if something inside me
insisted he knew it was there, how I only said yes
because there was no one to sing along to Black Sabbath
playing on the radio in the next room,
the man never guessing me for a fan
and having no time to love me or the flower pinned in my hair
as I pretended to be some other kind of woman
who would never bake cupcakes for a birthday.
I doubt what you say about staying loyal to your home base
and hope no man ever describes me as a baseball cliché
while a waiter glides past us with crème brulee,
a room service tray meant to entice other diners
away from their husbands and wives.
I have ordered room service with boys
who liked to watch porn and eat sushi off my thighs
and men who designed sugar as foreplay,
a crescendo of spoons eternally tapping for that one sweet spot.
I could have almost loved you if we ate lunch outside,
this time our hands butterflying each other
as we wonder what will come of the day,
the thought of spending time with crème brulee
no more delicious than buying an old record from the store next door,
a former hard rock anthem blazed on its sleeve
as we remember how it feels getting to first base,
that rocketing red glare before we grow old enough
to need secret sugar off a tray,
that edible Cinderella shoe,
to find each other even a little bit charming.

The Last Supper

El Gaucho, SW Broadway

Even the day before Christmas
they bring a slice of lime on a saucer
to float in my Diet Coke like we are celebrating.
The next table over cracks walnuts,
reveals blue veins with their cheese knives
and I wonder if they are also pretending
their brother is still alive.
I want to say, Wait, this is specific.
We are different the way everyone thinks they are different.
Someone orders wine. I can never taste
the chocolate or the leather and wonder
if the aged oak barrel looks like the cartoon
of a man jumping over Niagara Falls.
Those suspenders must save him every time.
To create the illusion of appetite before dinner
we walked past all the downtown mannequins
I once starved myself to look like.
Now we spend too much on steak and lobster
and order dessert in our brother's honor
that everyone just pushes around on their plates.
Sometimes nights in Portland feel customized for pleasure.
Midnight dirty snowball donut runs, pretending
to get married at The Church of Elvis, 1991,
when everyone good was still alive, like Kelly
and Kurt Cobain and Paul Newman and your mother.
The moments when staring at a bridge reveals
something more than wanting to jump over.
This not one of those nights.
I was reading a book about JFK Jr.'s plane crash
the night you died. This fact feels important,
like how I used to fantasize about watching
the Macy's Thanksgiving parade with John-John
in the secret window of a penthouse
lined with his mother's first editions
and his father's ghost to avenge like our very own Hamlet.
I have never been drunk enough or religious enough
to see a ghost but now look for signs everywhere,
poking my head in Cameron's Books
to flip through yellow tabloids and wait for a sign.
Something simple, like "Yours til Niagara Falls."
There doesn't need to be a barrel. Maybe a recipe book
because in the life we are still stuck in you once cooked
a chicken dish that made me like eating chicken again.
I never thought I would run out of time to tell you

I really liked the way you cooked chicken.
I don't understand signs enough to know
if that old People magazine photo crumbling
in my hands of John Jr. and Carolyn
when they were still the Kennedys our mothers
ran out of time to pin their next hopes on
was a message about how death meets
older brothers and East Hampton blondes evenly.
Maybe the nights made for pleasure
are the only nights we should remember.
How another brother made sure our waiter
understood the way I like my steak
then told me when it came to not be afraid
of a final toast followed by a first cut
and the tiny bit of blood left dazzling
my clean white plate.

The Light in Your Kitchen Window

You do not know I am standing out here
like something, for once, that belongs in the dark.
I am not afraid of an errant zombie
lost and looking for brains
or the kind of man who collects fingers in a box,
breath catching the way it does
on the biggest and best carnival ride
at the thought of cutting off the tips
where my composed shadows play against your front walk.
There is a circus in my heart for you.
What I mean is more than the roar of a lonely woman
masquerading as a ghost beneath the streetlight.
You have tried many times to turn me
into your own private ghost
by the way you keep your lips closed now when we kiss,
and how we never kiss,
and how you dropped my nickname somewhere out back,
but this sideshow we exist in is still filled with hope.
There is cotton candy there, too,
electric pink dross of good dreams
before all we did was go around saying,
or refusing to say, *I'm sorry*.
We have washed and dried dishes in the same sink
so this is nothing to shut your blinds to,
the way I wave before you go to the bed
I have loved you in and out of too many times
to keep hidden in my own special box.
I am standing outside your window
watching you water plants, make tomorrow's sandwich,
force yourself not to wave back.
I mean the kind of sorry that might sound better
translated into the private language we once spoke
when we liked the same movies we hadn't even seen,
Laurel and Hardy and that piano
negotiating their thirty-nine steps
onto a list of favorites we meant to sip hot chocolate to,
some certain look shared between us
no other certain looks could compete with.
The look that keeps me anchored in front of your window
long after the lights go out,
long after you tuck yourself in
by negotiating your body to turn from where I once slept,
somehow a little afraid of what will happen next.

