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Amish Paradise

xiao yi huang

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emma eisenberg
ross sager
jill foley
natasha dravid
ryan pirtle-mcveigh
jacob lipson
cedar balazs
abbey huff
lisa summergrad
carly yasinski
rebecca morgan
natasha dravid

Jeff’s Ghost
evan raskin
The Enlightenment Blues

This Kant be happening.
There’s a Voltaire in the pocket my jeans
Which are already covered in Philosophe serve ice cream
That an entire bar of Rousoap couldn’t remove.

Then I John Locked myself out of the Descartes
When my keys Baroque
So now I’m Montescrewed and Absolutely lost with
Some Saloonitic truck driver
Who’s probably Robert Hooked on a bunch of Thomas Painekillers

At least he saved from those Despoheads who kept
Banging on the hood of my brand Newton Toyota.

They say life’s a bed of Dideroses
But quite Franklin I’m fed up.

O mighty clockmaker!
Give me a Rockerfeller to lean on.
I have a collection of pills only slightly smaller than my collection of advice concerning the best ways to get to sleep. Does the average person really fall asleep within seven minutes of going to bed?

Before I had herbal extractions and knock-out pills and tea with milk and meditation, I told myself stories—crawling with monsters, carnivorous teddy bears, eerily lit clearings and giant foxes with yellow teeth, the only stories that gripped my five year-old mind firmly enough to pull me into sleep just to wake up sweating and reaching for my light switch, and then begin telling again.

As soon as I learned to read that light became my savior in a new way and I would spend nights greedily consuming books until I passed out in a ball, cradling paperbacks like stuffed animals.

It’s always been this, the only love-hate relationship I know.

---

Extra Time

I carefully line up the pills. I make the tea, sometimes bitter-clear and sometimes with just a drop of milk and enough honey to fill the bottom of the mug. Armed for sleep, I face it, only to shy away at the prospect of that awful inbetween time, the hours that should be minutes when I lie in bed eyes willfully closed and body immobile but mind racing through places I keep closed in the day. So I read, or cook, or just sit and let the minutes pass until that perfect moment when the house and the world are mine. The most beautiful moments come next to the most sour, and I smile at 3:37 but 3:38 is judging me and 3:40 makes me want to crawl under the covers and not come out until late the next afternoon.
And he drinks now. He drinks now at his in-laws. He drinks because he wanted to be a musician, drinks because he can hear his drums again. And he drinks because he's stuck selling cars to men going through their mid-life crisis. They want bright red, passionate punch, if you will, color that reminds them of the phone number written on that motel's coaster. He drinks because he knows in ten years, he too will be one of them, wanting bright red, wanting his secretary, wanting a faster car to get him the fuck out of here. It wasn't supposed to be like this.

And so he drinks now because it is the only decision he can make.

One drink makes him remember and the other makes him forget the details of each day. The call from her elementary school principal saying “She’s fine; I can’t even imagine how it happened.” Later over eggplant parmesan, his skin bubbles as his 11 year-old daughter tries to make sense of the “prank” the cool 7th grade girls played on her. She thinks she’s fine too, but all he can see are the 13 year olds with their skirts rolled so high that the pink polka dotted underwear peaks out and clashes with the navy, white, and red pattern. His fist hits the table as he thinks of her squirming as they pulled her hair so tight she could feel the follicles expand. So tight the empty promise, “If you just get into the trunk, you’d be cool too,” seemed merited.

And so he drinks now because it is the only decision he can make.

Break the seal. He thinks about the 1992 Toyota Corolla. He focuses on her lop-sided pony tail, and wonders if it was those, those, damn girls who made her hair unmanageable, those damn sluts who made his life unmanageable. And he feels his hands shake the way hers did earlier today, as the trunk door slammed. Tonight he pours that memory away. The first sip. The first exhale. He closes his eyes, and the white stripe in her plaid jumper illuminates the peaceful darkness he had been longing for since lunch. He watches as it runs along her knee, the same knee that was so pudgy it took her a couple extra months to stand, the same knee that got seven stitches after her bike hit the puddle. He wasn’t there when the pebbles broke her skin, and he wasn’t there when she was taken prisoner by that clique.

And so he drinks now because it is the only decision he can make.

ACE
Although he hears her say, “Daddy, let’s play catch tonight,” he doesn’t answer. He doesn’t answer because he doesn’t know that the only thing she needs from him right now is the rhythm of the game. He doesn’t answer because the sound of the ball pounding into his glove would remind him of the slamming trunk. He doesn’t answer because he is focused on another sip. Maybe the next sip will drown out the pounding inside his head, maybe the next sip will drown out the bang of his fist against the maple kitchen table, maybe not. Tonight he can only imagine the power that the nun used to hit the Corolla trunk, after those girls broke down and admitted to having “encouraged” her inside 4 hours earlier.

And so with each sip, it gets a little darker. With each sip it gets a little quieter. The plaid stripe moves farther and farther away, and he now sees the 7 stitches. He remembers the pudgy knee. And then he remembers nothing at all.

Once more a familiar pounding, this time on his bedroom door. He rolls over 4 hours after he had originally been encouraged to go to his room. He rolls over the bottle of Jack Daniels. He rolls over in time to see her horrified look, and realizes she too, at 11 knows what its like to worry, she too knows how the pinky turns black and blue after minutes of pounding. She too knows what its like to feel loss.

And so he drinks now not because it is the only decision he can make, but because he can’t decide not to.
The birch and blackberry pond
have grown in together.
Low lands and high grasses,
moving in the wind.
Low-lying souls, like mine,
take refuge here.

A chickadee flits
from branch to branch.
Cloud, ironwood and stone commiserate
in their grey language
of the profound loneliness
of cold things, gifted in strength,
in power, even their own slow-forming grace,
but are not beautiful.

Low-lying souls take care.
In other seasons, the path to this refuge
may be hidden.
By emerald fern and dense moss.

So, if you must,
be like the stone or the ironwood,
and make of this place a home for yourself.
You shall become like them,
Strong, and powerful, and lonely, and cold as one devoid of beauty.
One who will never be looked at as the truly beautiful are.
If I threw the pill away

I would be full and round
pungent like cantaloupe melon
lying on the bed while
you trace circles
with work-worn fingers
around my north pole,
and say:
    “What about Elvis for a boy?”
And I grin
and rub sleep from your eye.

Each night, I take one from the case.
Tiny, cylindrical,
they are ours.
We could take turns naming then in alphabetical order,
Annabelle to Zed—
Hurricanes of children.

I don’t want to be my parents,
pregnant at 19,
but you’re tall with dark hair like my father,
and my mother’s me.

Wednesday just fell into the sink.

And this is a gift that will keep our refuge hidden
when it needs to be hidden, and deeply rooted
as only the stone and the ironwood are rooted,
committed and faithful, in their slow grace,
to the maintenance of this place.

Oh, to rest my body
in the low lands and high grasses.
By the birch and the blackberry pond.

When the time comes, I will.
In my uptight family, we respect the law and our elders, we encourage abstinence from the dangerous triad of sex-drugs-and-rock n’ roll, nobody curses in public, and we save all the bows on Christmas.

With my uptight family, I never thought that I would be able to say at nineteen years of age that my family snuck me into a bar where my mother bought me drinks I couldn't finish and my aunt and I belted dirty karaoke, where three generations danced wildly together in the smoky haze and my grandmother and I were each propositioned – twice – by the same two men.

If this is what it's really like, I don't think I'll mind growing up so much after all.
I touched the Manhattan Bridge,  
the base,  
where it disappears under choppy east river scum,  
and my boots sank eerily into the jello-sand  
every few seconds,  
and wisps of Aviva's cigarette smoke  
float ed past,  
like phantom strings.

I was shivering and  
it was dark. The tide was low.  
So low, and we were remarkably far out,  
with lonely rocks  
and half-buried trees, poking out of the quicksand  
like forgotten donuts in the trash,  
wailing silently of car crashes and murders on piers  
somewhere.  
There was no smell of salt upon the breeze;  
instead, the rank and putrid scent  
of something long decayed  
wisped by, stinging the insides of my face,  
and we trudged out to massive stones that merged with steel  
stretching out across a blue black sky  
that sparkled  
with planes instead of stars.

And then we found the cave  
nestled behind bars on the river side  
of a concrete block by the jetty,  
and when the flash bulb exploded  
I half expected to see a rotting corpse  
illuminated,  
chained in the inky dark,  
just out of reach of high tide,  
staring at me with hollow black eyes  
from the screen on the back of my camera.  
But there were only broken bricks  
and seaweed growing between the cracks,  
and darkness further on.

It wasn't boredom that compelled us to leave,  
but the silence that crushed us,  
and the darkness that seemed to flow down our throats  
with every startled breath we took.
So we sloshed back through the rubble to the safety of real land  
and drank our liquor-tea from thermoses on the steps  
of ABC Carpet and Home  
while garbage trucks rattled by on their way  
to pick up a city's worth of trash.
His tooth aches,
and so I am happy, since each throb
reminds him of what was. I look at him
— sitting alone in his chair, while
I watch through the fogged glass —
and I wonder where his thoughts are.
Does he wonder, I wonder,
what might have been? Does he ever
wander and find himself before my bedroom?
I can see his tooth aching,
and I wonder if I ever wander into
his dreams anymore. I wonder
if when I disappeared, he ever
wished I would return. I stand close
to the window, my breath fogging its glass,
and I pretend I am looking at a reflection of myself;
I pretend we are alike. His tooth
aches, and I bite down hard to stop
its throbbing.
no one is awake
except me and this airplane
that looks like a bat

I’m in class,
sitting next to a guy
that one friend loved
and one friend fucked,
and I’m feeling like a traitor
just for sitting here
and liking his eyelashes.

Muses

Ryan Lin Cameron

Lisa Summergrad

It’s 5:51 and I Hear a Schrvroom: Look Up.

no one is awake
except me and this airplane
that looks like a bat

Ryan Lin Cameron

Muses

Nate Ndosi
My dictionary tells me that I am insane, but my dictionary is what makes me insane. It sits under my bed, red and leather-bound: an antique, with cut pages and an illegible note scribbled inside the front cover. I am an inventor and a poet because (believe it or not) I have discovered new ways of reading it…new ways of reading my dictionary; that is. After opening and closing the tattered leaves at least 104 times, the simplest things were almost instantaneously apparent: “potpourri” looked like it should mean “confetti;” definitions sounded better when read at ninety degree angles across the page, and the alphabet, Noah Webster, pages, ink, meanings, not-meanings, chocolate smudges—they were negotiable. I think you could call me an explorer because I am (of course) finding new things every day. But look—this is what I have so far: The First/Last Word Dictionary When applying this method of decipherment to your dictionary, take the first word and the last word of each page, bring them together in one phrase, and take that phrase to stand for the definitions of all words in between. Talk about loaded statements! Who would think that ABSOLUTE- ABSURDISM could encompass abstract expressionism, absorbency, and abstinence? You must be able to accept the fact that words never and always mean what they mean; do you see? It’s like how David didn’t understand: when he asked me what I felt for him, and I said “LOUIS TREIZE-LOW, David. LOUIS TREIZE-LOW, my darling,” he walked away with tears. He didn’t hear the word love sandwiched in the middle.

The Inside-Out Dictionary When you speak, use the word as the definition and the definition as the word. Every word turns into five, and the letters branch out and branch from branches into space, until you forget what you meant to say and everyone stops listening. I know that I’m crazy.

Woman #1: How are you feeling today, Bea?
Me: …of a favorable character or tendency; handsome, attractive; suitable; advantageous; upper class; free from infirmity or sorrow…¹

¹ Definition: for “good.” Taken with love from my first dictionary. My mother gave me the dictionary and the note on the first page is in her handwriting.

Woman #1: I am so tired…
I think Woman #1 is my sister. She has OPULENTLY-ORCHESTRA (orange) hair.

When you find my small red dictionary, promise to read it the way I read it. These are instructions, or they should be.


Love means glove.

The Rule of Hydro Everything that begins with the prefix hydro means water.

The Rule of Page One Everything on page one of my red dictionary means, “I’m sorry.”

Six years ago, when I was 12, David took me to the zoo to see the pusillanimous and I did not know yet that I would LOUIS TREIZE-LOW him one day. I didn’t even know the word LOUIS TREIZE-LOW. I liked the way he held my hand, as if I were so much younger than him, and the way he laughed at the animal balloons. Smaller children would lose hold of the wispy ribbons, letting the zebras and donkeys and chimpanzees rise up into the sun. They were flying far away behind us, and it looked like they were popping out of David’s head, little balloon ideas. Pop—idee! Much later, I told him that I wanted to hold him for stability. Stability times two, he said. Stability times stability, I said, infinity times infinity. David, were you mocking my language?
The Rule of Closed Covers
Slamming the leather-bound cover down into the pages causes a seismic shift. Nothing means anything and everything means everything. None of the rules even work anymore.

I can’t pronounce this word…SLAM
I can’t understand this word…SLAM
I won’t see this word…SLAM
I won’t hear this word…SLAM
I won’t I won’t I won’t I won’t…SLAM.

The Dictionary of Illness
There are illnesses that might as well be synonymous with death. But the ones that aren’t death aren’t life either: they disappear, drift unnoticed, are there but not there. They are taking up space on my pages. Since I cannot make ink disappear, I use a thick pen to delete each and every one. Ugh, the pen bleeds.

Mother always wore gray, until she matched the walls, until she matched the sofa, until she was and then was nothing.

The Rule of No Dictionary
The Rule of No Dictionary is when David takes the dictionary away. He steals it from me and walks to the Hudson and eats a burger and contemplates throwing it into the water and he cries and cries and cries. Maybe for me. But he always brings the dictionary home, so sometimes I think he does understand and that he does love…but I wait by the window anyway. There are no words for people who wait by windows.

The Dictionary of My Sister

The Rule of Because I Said So
“Bea, now we’re going to play house.”
“Why?”
“Because I said so. Now we make Valentines.”
“Why?”
“Because I said so. Now we write stories.”
“Why?”
“Because I said so. Now you fall in love with David.”
“Why?”
“Because I said so. Now you go insane.”
“Why?”
“Because I said so. Now I marry David.”
“Why?”

My small red dictionary stopped being definitive when I felt the need to think for myself. Some people interpret my independent mind as gravity. I mean insanity. Am I crazy? I mean crazy. My sister tucks her OPULENT-ORCHESTRA hair behind her ears and hums “a song to quiet children and lull them to sleep.” She thinks I don’t hear her, but I do: “Why did you leave me, Bea.” David is in the kitchen making burgers but not for me. SLAM.

Why won’t you leave me be.

2 A lullaby. I remember that the note inside the cover was written in blue ink but I smudged it accidentally when I spilled a glass of hydrophobia. Maybe the ink was red and the cover was blue. Maybe they were both.
The Dictionary of My Mother

The Dictionary of My Mother is empty. It exists in the white space between the words. When no one is speaking, no one (everyone) is using this dictionary. Everything about my mother was lost when I smudged the ink inside the cover. Now, all it says is “I glove you, Bea.” And that can’t mean a thing at all. That can’t mean a thing at all.

The Dictionary of Light Through the Cracks in the Door

You can’t trust words you hear after bedtime when people are still awake in the halls. Especially when there are soft footsteps muffling the syllables.

Last night David and Woman #1 were planning the wedding in the living room. Maybe my room is the dead room. White roses, champagne, strawberries, springtime, balloons. Animal balloons. I’ll always be Woman #2, but you can’t listen to things after bedtime. Sleep.

The Music Dictionary

Sing all “A” words on an A, all “B” words on a B, all “C” words on a C, all “D” words on a D…then, life is an opera? Or a very long lullaby.

When I was 15 my mother took me to the beach because that’s what we had planned to do. The city streets were filled with potpourri as we drove away. Parades. I remember standing on the shore. I remember remembering the pusillanimous from years before, and I remember the sky was yellow. Why? Because I said so. I remember us standing on the edge of the hydrofoil with our toes all wet and sandy and she said to give her some hugs very quickly, and she pulled pieces of potpourri out of my hair. Mother squeezed my hand and ran into the waves of hydrodynamics, and now that I’ve written the music dictionary I realize why I opened my mouth and couldn’t say your name: your name begins with a D and I have always been an alto. I must have been trying to say your name when Mother disappeared in the hydrobiology, hydrostatic in her lungs and between her lips. Do you think…?
“There’s a slate gray cat that circles the house.”
“Clockwise,” he adds,
With just an air of urgency
And a strange, knowing glare embedded in his tone of voice.

Static falls between us.

“Wait, what?”

“She comes round every day. She comes closer to the house every day. Sometimes she pauses and draws herself out, making luxuriating threats in her motion. I can see only one way out of this.”

“Jerry,” I say, “are you okay?”

“Bring your shovel; we must act fast.”
Through an open window, I hear the stream beside our house.
Light fills the room; I sit cradling this baby in my arms
While you sit opposite me, across the red tiles that span the floor.

Father, though you’ve kept unnaturally silent for hours,
I can feel that common awareness filling the room,
Giving weight to the space between us, like the milk that fills my breasts.

This suckling child, conceived one year ago today,
Has planted a seed of hatred in my heart.
Can I nourish her at my breast, and keep the milk pure of my fury or my hate?

My mind returns to our garden, where I see my sister planting tomato seeds,
The folds of her dress rippling in the wind, moving with the stream.
Her motions, she bends, carrying her forward in time, she covers a seed with the auburn earth, as if they were the hands of fate, leading her life-thread out to the garden,
Until she hears his footsteps at her back, and feels his hungry hands upon her hips.

Her little mouth tugs at my nipple, pulling me back to this room, where you, Father, polish in your hands the long, broad sword lying prone in your lap.
What is it to take another’s life? A baby in my arms,
Blood-stains on your blade, red as my sister’s dress caked with dirt,
her basket thrown to the ground, scattering seeds.

Red like the tomatoes that she planted, just before he took her.
I remember they grew full and green, then ripe,
then picked, the morning you sold her from our house. And I remember how our stomachs ached that night, as if that fruit held in its seeds the pain of lost virginity, the terror in every inch of flesh.
The baby’s put to bed, and so I sit cradling my breasts, and out in the silence I hear you, Leaving to go to town. I know where you go, and I see in your eyes, upon return, A change from before, clearer with every cycle of the moon.
What do you thrust upon them, emptying out those eyes? More vacant, more quiet than when you left—where does it go?
What terrible voice do you give your lust, that here at home you need not speak?
This child will be speaking soon; in secret I have taught the hidden language of her mother’s silence. Then, Father, you will hear the words of a seed that can’t be swallowed.

Parthenia Speaks for Her Sister, the Slave
It’s a night when the world has narrowed to one street, one building, one stone path: a soundstage with a safe curve of sky overhead and a dome of stars. The set is low-budget, a few steps down to the sidewalk, but in the streetlight the grass is technicolor green and the air is room temperature, with a soft soundtrack seeping from an open window.

It’s the foreground that’s in focus: his hair in his eyes, the clean line of his profile and his left knee touching my right while we talk and I can’t help thinking how picture perfect this is, how posed we are and ready for the big screen and I can’t help hoping that he’ll kiss me when the camera rolls.

But then he breaks character, breaks the mood, and pulls me up to play hopscotch. Imaginary hopscotch. No chalk, no numbered boxes, no pebbles; we skitter across the sidewalk in our bare feet, counting off our hops, skips, jumps. The setting’s the same but the script is different; now we’re ad-libbing.

Laughing, he lands where ten would be if we had chalk and whirls to face me with a grin. Everything slides into slow-motion and I catch my breath and think damn. No one on earth could write this night the way that we have.
The hurricane has thrown me.  
I used to balance myself as if on tightrope  
but balance is just a papery memory now.  
The origami crane on my desk keeps drifting away  
due to mysterious breezes.  

I’ve been finding remnants of the storms hiding  
in the oddest places: stirring up my coffee,  
blowing open textbooks, spurting out of the showerhead.  
There was a cyclone in the washing machine.  

I huddle in sweaters and layer my socks  
but there are pores and holes in everything.  
At night, lying still, I feel thunder in my thighs and hips.  

The torrents are over the ocean now,  
but in the orchards, one gust comes like a sigh  
and all the apples fall.  

Spin me tight around a spool, keep me close  
so I can’t be kite-string hoisted up into the air. That upward tug,  
those unraveling blasts and currents make me fret -- string me  
to someone’s guitar. Lace me into sneakers or wrap me, viney,  
around a wooden trellis. Wind me up in a dental floss box.  
I want to be rooted and tied to myself, locked to this spot.  

I don’t want to be swept or knocked or tossed to the skies.
A Catholic is more capable of evil than anyone. I think perhaps because we believe in Him we are more in touch with the devil than any other people. – Brighton Rock

Jaundiced Mary has a clever tongue
Or does she, when snuffling through lettuce stumps?
Here is England and here, a great glass cup:
Now drained and drafty and full of what was.

Wet-lipped Samuel Carpenter, the priest of the first and third
Doesn't mind the second, or so we've heard.
He spreads his limbs,
“Looking like a Kestrel with
That beaky nose – who's he playing?”
When Sammy calls you for redemption, you just nod, swallowing
The lump that might be your tongue.

I, the great cobwebs on the curtains of the hall
Did sit, and see, and mourn at all -
Sweet napes of boys' necks, ascending flushes on flesh -
And while I was weaved, I saw the creating.
When he struck down my Maker, I saw them fail.
My brother, the almagest of dust swirling below his robe
Did his wicked dance on their toenails
And, after the wails, on their nice black shoes
That his sister Mary scrubbed clean to draw a glance from God.

But my brother, born of neglect, had no tender scraps
And threw his laughter onto the pulpit.
Shock of fire on the stairs,
Peter nimbling his way to the altar with a wincing grin,
His limbs lacking and thin.
But O, boy – on the dangerous precipice of
Youth and the tremulous self-birth.

He was waiting to be shattered. To find some nice thick girl to glue glass with her heavy moans.
She has not arrived.
But he totes around the feeling of his empty bones in a leaky leather sack.
The cross of ashes invisible, but ever staining his forehead -

Which now wrinkles at tax returns.
He squints his eyes in cobble-stones
Weeping for the greatness of small places.
Instead he knows not but tightness,
And against the new masonry he re-erected the old rampart of bones.

In his youth, he scowled at me, but I saw:
The vesicles yearning, the arteries plugged up with love.
For God, and for Good, and for my weavers, so he let us be.

(If I could bind up my boy in tearaway tires,
And help preserve the Youth one so admires.)

With a prick of my veins he would wake
And re-realize. Every day, anon and anon
Like my Anna, he would declare
That purity means nothing, easily distracted are we
From the tools and tricks of our trade. You're like England, I would say:
The wildness has gone out of you.

Once Mary whistled in the dark, oh what fun, boys!
While all the while I felt screaming through the solitude.
Trying to shatter silence without speech.
They put her in a veil! They tore her hair rather than see it grow.
Sweet Thessaly, restore yourself –
But when the walls of the convent open, I pray they are not there.
Sewn year little soul setsdowning
Et together once removed then
From himself, is ready to leve.
“What will I write tonight?” he thought,
But the pen got clogged up
So he sits a little fire
On the tap of the little match,
And sut it up to the pen’s end.

(Primatouristufdeluviastipinseyargentlesinthewayagobekome)

The pen went to vomiting on,
Forming a big blatch glob, so he
Sat there thoompling through the ink spot
Pouring out the evening filled up
With nothing left to say or do
That hadn’t come already now.

When it got stuck between fingers,
It felt like snotsplotted viskus,
It left big thock stains every were
It set emparsingly.

Knowwell
Patterned madness never really comes out.
When you open the door, there are twelve sets of young student eyes on you. You let the door close again, you do not walk through it. Think about not moving, think about running for your life. Exhale, and push through. Hope no one has noticed, or if they have, hope they think you were confused about the room number.

You pick a spot in the back, near the radiator, and begin to set up your easel. Notice a young man with long hair in the center of the room, pulling gently on a piece of red silk. On top of the silk, there are several pieces of fruit; an apple, red, and a peach, or maybe it is a mango. This man, who you take to be the instructor, is decades younger than you. Don't think about how many. Think about taking up smoking again. Wonder why you quit in the first place, and then remember it was because of the baby. Remember those terrifying nights you spent watching Bob Ross's afro paint “happy trees” on mute while you listened to her breathing, praying for a clear, easy breath, just one time.

A middle-aged man behind you taps your shoulder and hands you a tube of burnt umber. Watch his mouth move, and smile. His dark hair rises in crests and tufts like the stiff peaks of egg whites.

“I think you dropped this,” he says again, and presses the cold tube into your palm. Smile graciously and turn away. Stand there a moment, screwing and unscrewing the cap. A boy who looks like he is still in high school clears his throat, and turns his easel slightly, squinting his eyes. A young woman in brown boots and too much eyeliner tears a sheet off of her pad and throws it away in disgust. You can see your daughter being friends with this young woman, they look about the same age, have the same easy way of tossing their bangs out of their eyes. Think about how your daughter is braver than you, how she belongs in this room. Recently she has taken to painting small, square, watercolor paintings of flowers and seeing married men.

“But I don't want him to leave her,” she says on the telephone. Sigh and pretend not to understand. She tells you to take a class, and you promise you will.

“I worry about you, all alone, with no one to talk to but Dad,” she says.

“Dad’s better these days,” you say. “Just last week we went to the theater, and after all he had was seltzer with lime.”

“Mom…” she says. Tell her you love her, tell her the phone is running out of batteries, tell her you’ll call her later. Hang up the phone, go to the freezer, and pour the rest of the vodka down the sink. Run the garbage disposal just to make sure.

The instructor with the ponytail is gesticulating wildly in the air above the fruit. He tells you not to paint the fruit, but what is behind the fruit. You look around at the other students, who all take up their brushes, eagerly, and with gusto. You cannot remember the last time you were eager for anything. The young woman in the brown boots tosses her bangs out of her eyes, and puts down big, bold strokes in Prussian blue like a road map. Pick up a small brush, and hold it over the canvas. Wait.
Wear a green dress and be the first one there. There are mirrors set up all over the classroom. Go to one and look at yourself apathetically. Comb your fingers through your hair and part it on the side. Notice that the texture of your hair has changed. It feels like old person’s hair, like straw but thinner. When had it changed? You can’t remember. Remember your mother calling you at three in the morning, complaining she was starving. “Can’t you bring me a hamburger? A real rare one, you know?” Watching her shove the dripping pink meat, like flesh, into her mouth as she leaned over the kitchen sink. Nothing was ever rare enough for her. Remember putting her to bed and stroking her hair and telling yourself your hair would never feel like that.

The door breathes open and the long-haired instructor hurries in, cocooned in a dark brown overcoat. He nods at you and disappears in the back. When he returns he is gripping an enormous boom box. He fiddles with it for a moment and then, “I came in from the wilderness, a creature void of form, come in she said I’ll give ya, shelter from the storm.” Other students start to arrive, and you busy yourself mixing colors. “Today we are doing self portraits,” the instructor says. Then he smiles and wiggles his bushy eyebrows, and says, “I want you paint yourself in a way that expresses the essence of you.” The class twitters. “Ok, go to it.” He rubs his hands together and then turns on his heel to go fiddle with the music.

Make little blobs of white all over your palette, like polka dots. Focus on one blob, all the way in the left corner of your palette. Mix in worms of cadmium yellow and burnt umber and Prussian blue until you get something resembling a skin tone. Look down at your pale, thin wrists that never could hold bracelets, and know that something is wrong. Or else if not wrong, then not quite right. Start over again with another blob of white. Cover your palette with various shades of beige. Think about when your daughter came home one day from school, having learned about racism.

“Mom, what color am I?” she’d asked between bites of applesauce. You’d looked at her for a long moment before replying, “Well, you are mostly a kind of pinky beige with bits of purple and green. But today, in this light, I can see some red and yellow in you too.” Your husband turns from his desk in horror, as if you are some sort of alien, someone far way that he doesn’t recognize, has never recognized. He turns to your daughter.

“You’re white, honey. Completely white.”

Stare again into the mirror the instructor has given you. Look at your face, the bags under your eyes like rounded pockets. You’re exhausted all the time but can’t sleep. You lie awake listening to the sirens of fire engines and ambulances rushing about in the dark. “That’s the least of it,” your husband says. But sometimes they get so loud, you think they’re right outside, right downstairs, coming up the elevator. You wake up smelling smoke.

The young woman with the bangs has painted herself in the nude, and the middle-aged man that picked up your paints last week, has given himself a hat. Look at your nose, small and a little turned up. Think about genetics, the things we pass on and the things we try to keep for our own. When, at sixteen, your daughter tells you she has been cutting herself, be horrified but unsurprised. Show her your own, faint but still visible beneath the stretch marks on your hips. Watch a sad show on T.V. and cry together into your popcorn. Hug goodnight and go to bed in separate rooms. When your husband falls into bed, smelling of olives and vermouth, put his hand there. Trace his heavy, dead fingers over the lines on your hip.

The longhaired instructor is wandering slowly around the room, making little scuffing sounds with his shoes. He walks by you, then stops and scuffs backwards. Looks at your blank canvas, then at your palette, then back at you for a long, long time.

“Good start,” he says, and scuffs away. Spend the rest of the class time mixing skin tones that don’t ever look just like you. On the way home, buy a muffin and call your daughter on her cell phone. Get her answering machine. Try to think of something, anything to say. Say nothing at all.

— Week Two — Self-Portrait

emma eisenberg
When first you caught my eye, Cherie, you seemed
An apple, rosy-skinned and sweet to taste,
The love of loves for which I’d always dreamed,
Angelic, fallen from some Higher place.
With time and care, I tried to win your heart,
But like that fateful lesson learned by Eve,
With forkéd tongue, you rent my soul apart,
Though flesh did gleam, appearances deceived,
And left my body aching—c’est la vie!
Once past the scented garlands that you wore,
You weren’t the saintly belle I’d hoped you’d be,
I found you bitter, rotten to the core.
1. It was women who made the moon: strong star-women who molded the pearl orb with the heels of their hands. They spun it on an axel until it was round, watermelon sliced it into crescents and cried on it till it shimmered.

They made the moon-clay out of milk and sand and silver, nickel and tin cans, aluminum foil, their mothers' eyelashes and abalone shells. They glazed it with ice water, lacquered it smooth. Scooped out the craters with spoons.

The star-women wrestled with the ocean, pushed and pulled the tides so they could admire the moon from all her angles. Their sweat made the water salty.

2. At night we ache. There are hollows, moon-shaped spaces in our bodies that life will never fill. Wind and water wash over and through us we are leaky empty vessels.

I've tried to plug the holes with clay, with love, with ice, flesh, bone — and I've tried to up and ride the moon but she's slick as soap. Every time I grab on, some of me catches, snags onto a star, gets stuck up there but my body falls and lands in the sea a little hollower a little holier and oh I am a drum, a tin can, a bucket.

Beat on me a rhythm and I will try to be a vessel, carry love, flesh, soul if you think they'll fill my spaces fill my spaces fill me in.
They have placed daffodils
in each of the windows of the synagogue.
It is two o’clock, and the sun
wraps its arms around this spring afternoon.

One cannot ignore the sheer beauty,
alive on this day.

In the front sits the family.
And poems, with those who will read,
sit on either side of the podium,
waiting patiently, for their chance
to embrace the people.

I sit off to the side,
ashamed of the way I am
compelled to stare
at the man, sitting, in the front row;
who shakes uncontrollably,
sobbing, while his son sits beside him, unable to move himself
even to console his father
on the day of her death.

Thoughts After Attending a Memorial Service in the Springtime

ryan pinnel-mceveigh

Pont du Avignon

jacob lipson
revelation

i used to say
i miss the oddballs
(and i still do)

who—

wearing
2 dollar dinosaur t-shirts or
an old man’s bowling league jacket
teaching me
to build a no trace fire
leading classes
called “jumping over things”
for P.E.
beaming
because she spent two hours
learning “toxic” on her flute
instead of studying

—were the best I ever met.

but friday laughing
at grandma’s boy

i see
that

true friends
don’t always have blue hair.
I can see my father dying.
Not like either grandfather with machines
and hospitals at the end of his life, having seen
graduations and weddings and surrounded
by worried grandchildren,
with a slow organ fade out in the end.

No, it'll be quick and soon.
A tingle in his arm that he'll ignore
— he's so damn stubborn —
to finish writing, followed
by a collapse on the floor of his office.
He works late, later even than the custodian,
so it might be hours before my mom
even thinks to worry.

And when I hear her voice at 3 am
I will know in that place where you just know
that when she says “it’s Dad”
she means that the stress and junk food,
his expanding waistline
and his awful foolish pride
got him. Ended him a sad lone figure
crumpled facedown on the floor.
The ice was three inches deep
on trees and houses, on our off-white trim,
and how – I never knew, I couldn’t tell.

Quite young, I had no promises to keep,
no school, no lights, and cribbage games to win;
the ice was three inches deep!

Eight nights, we lit a fire, went to sleep,
well, my father did, I think – my mother didn’t follow him,
and why? I never knew, I couldn’t tell.

Eight days I watched the wreckage grow and creep
as giant trees destructed limb by limb.
The ice was three inches deep.

My father didn’t speak a lot that week
(my mother crying almost on a whim)
but why – I never knew, I couldn’t tell

that massive oaks and birches bend and creak
that thirty-year-old marriages grow thin
that the ice was three inches deep
and how I never knew—I couldn’t tell.
I loved you, my tweed-coated storyteller,  
under the pine trees and the star magnolia.  
We were outlawed from the cattail marsh.

You could turn a slab of bark  
to a polished teak wood desk.  
You vanished in a gondola.

In summer, I missed you,  
performed encores for our love  
trampled the emerald grass,  
banged on drums with a wooden spoons –  
I churned love butter and burned  
my lips on rosehip tea. I carved slices of  
golden peaches, scrubbed my paint-stained cheeks.  
I was a warrior with a wine-colored cry  
but you did not come back.

Autumn nights, the conifers swayed and silently  
dropped their cones. I bottled and corked the corals  
of our memories, stuffed the last of us into the cedar chest.

I keep far from forests now.  
Even the sound of snapping twigs  
reminds me of your voice.

— natasha
don dravid