

The First Face You Saw

I wanted mine to be the first face you saw coming out of surgery: lingering at the mouth of the operating theatre. I imagined blood as I waited; bodies at the mercy of discerning hands, cut open by strangers. I remember you recounting biology lessons, dissecting an animal and the humbling truth of its insides for the first time. *"Everything fit perfectly"*. We

do not collapse into each like that, the way lovers should. You are open like the best endings, I am a conclusion wound tight around secrets: Words left over from the last time I loved. You are right: I find no beauty in the everyday, in leaves coaxed by gravity to ground, in the symmetry between soil and sky. You should know by now: I write

because I cannot connect, cannot marry miracle to matter, metaphor to meaning, head to heart: this anesthesia I am under will not wear off like love, drugs, this thing that is us. Yet still, I wait, will breathe again as your body is rolled back towards mine: You are mine, if only for now. Slipping out of sleep, let my face be the first you see.

The Walk Back

Sitting at the airport, half past one
in the morning; people sleeping away
stopovers, bodies strewn across chairs
like forgotten luggage: I am alone,
a terminal one at Terminal One,
my bad puns lost on the empty seat

beside me. You were tossing and turning
the night you stayed, insomnia drenching
sheets bought together seven years
before, too big then, for mattress and frame
because a single bed was all we could
afford: no longer lovers, nor persuaded

by spatial restraints into each other's arms,
we sleep intertwined anyway; the body
remembering what the mind forgets
about love: what the heart cannot help
but put away, put off, put to sleep
to move on: I will only go home

once your plane has flown off; cry
only once the distance between us
expands into miles, brave the walk
back past the hall that spells departure
in four different languages, none of which
I can articulate, nor will ever understand.

Long before we were denied access
to our lovers on their deathbeds

Long before our shaved heads outraged you
and long tresses confused you

Long before we identified each other
through stride, shirt and prolonged eye contact

Long before we were teenagers beaten,
called names, run out of homes

Long before we were children drawn
to that one lone woman not in a dress

Long before the violence of history, pulpit
language and pen were enacted on our bodies

Long before the narcissism of your pornography
and the delusions of your medicine

Long before the secret spaces filled with longing
and failed marriages filled with excuses

Long before Ruth said to Naomi: *Where thou diest
will I die, and there will I be buried.*

Long before Sappho proclaimed her words
immortal, despite being

only breath.

Undo that gaze. We are no longer allowed to
push desire back and forth between glances;

better to cast deadpan stares across the sheets
like shadows: You and I, cast upon each other

like spells, and away from each other as if
there is magic in that too. Unravel yourself

from my belongings. There is no place left
to pack my heart. Perhaps I should leave

something behind: shirt, book, earring, receipt
for things that can be counted and mean so much

less than those that can't. Unmark the lapses
in conversation, fear of the word *love*, its claws

in my skin as you strain to understand my
silences: What use is talk? All I must say to

you cannot be distilled into words. Unfold
me from you. We are an origami creature

coming undone: my crumpled heart covered
in papercuts, weeps when no one is watching.

I want to write you a poem that unravels
from the gut, hurls itself towards you
like a slap across the mouth. Let my words
unleash themselves upon you like dogs
looking for a fight, like seeds bursting
from overripe pods. Let every vowel
explode in your face like cruel laughter,
every consonant pronounce itself like
death into your ear, every comma
trip up your speech, every full-stop
prevent you from finding your way
home. I hope you were not expecting

sweet nothings, loves songs, cherished
 clichés: the heart that triumphs over
adversity, finds strength in the adoring
eyes of a child, realizes that we are all
not so different after all; surely you are
not so naïve, not thinking I am going to turn
this into some *love poem*, waxing lyrical
about secrets whispered between sweethearts,
or about hands held on crowded trains
at dawn. Or about you, as if you take root
at the base of my spine, fingers climbing
each vertebra one by one. This is not

some ode with your name on it. I want
to write you a poem that drives a bullet
through all your beliefs, plagues you

with your own reflection, shatters every
illusion like bricks through a window
pane: let it stir the birds in your chest
so hard they burst through your flesh
in a spectacle of sound and despair. I
want to write you a poem that lingers
on your breath like cigarettes, stings
your eyes like salt, its fingers pointing
unflinchingly: *This is what you are.*