

House Wife

*Until we are all strong together,
a strong woman is a woman strongly afraid.*

~ Marge Piercy

Months later you're still crying, which just means you're not ready yet. I've seen all your postcards: Mozart's little wife flying to Asia for the first time with her Salzburg scent of domesticity, sitting quietly at home while husband writes the world. Then Susannah Ibsen and her quarrels, her determination to die in *that* chair, away from cold Oslo snow. You know the way the post works – don't they still call it *snail mail*, the rhyme softening how long it really takes? But the beauty of this delay is in slowing the decay of meaning, the temporality of utterance; forgotten writing wafts by airplane to be remembered in another hand. Also if there's anything that marks out a girl's handwriting, it is the carefulness of each small letter, crafted by years of praise teachers scrawled over school essays. *I am good*, whispers every later submission. *I want to be good enough*, your postcards read, and I quickly hear desire, fear, a longing for greatness distill into the minutiae of ink scratching the thick card, marking a voice into the physical world. Don't cry. You can write me, and that's good enough for anyone. Stamp away these tears and we'll get ready together.

Incomprehension

12:09 in a foreign bed alone
for a moment with Bon Iver
playing in the background. Hear
how music pulls one close
and away again, the same way
I miss you, and not always.
Sometimes I'm not sure
what throbs, whether
my dreams are telling me that
I want you. But I do,
the way one walks forward for feeling
a strong fish-line underfoot
yet knowing, for the same
reason, how precarious
it all is. I miss like *presque vu*,
the way we feel drunk
just hearing stories about drunkenness—
the things people do, beyond themselves.

How much of a need is intimacy,
the way it grips a heart?
Funny how we sympathise
with homeless children but scorn
ourselves for loneliness.

You open the door and return
to my side. It is 12:16,
I am still. Bon Iver
skipped in the background.
My mind's in a foreign bed.
I am alone.

Plus Six Five

I have finally mastered the art of adding seven to things.
Miles away, meditating on Pärt's supposed timelessness,
I try to write. Instead my thoughts drift
back to my room where the phone lies,
to the clock at the top right hand corner.

Eleven in the evening is when you wake
and now, at three in the afternoon,
I watch the remnants of your applause fade
with the end of the concert you're at – later
your lithe frame (but never your hands) falling asleep
in the train, phone safe in your trouser pocket.

At five in your morning I listen to different songs
drowning the silence I have grown to
expect like the constant tintinnabulation
of bells. My dearest still,
I don't remember when you became text
in a cold phone, or when I flew out of
your fingers in the same form.
Yet I cling to this immateriality of light,
night and day clocking our hours
amidst your body of words.

If mastery means that one no longer counts to know,
like the speed at which you read notes on that score,
I now understand why people return again and again
to the things they are good at
like things they love.

Missing

After O'Hara

Eight past two, I say to myself
in my newfound English English
after months of trains to

sing! In an opera house
I learnt instead how to speak
differently. Here everyone tried

to place my accent but even I
don't know what my teeth
and tongue feel any longer

and I will have forgotten
myself. Where I come from
they are fond of saying,

Don't forget your roots though
maybe they have stopped
pulling up the past while I

continued whistling to myself
in strange scales with
nasty names like

pen-ta-tonic which is
Chinese but I like it used
in Vaughan Williams who is

British. In any case
I am Singaporean not just
Chinese and I just wanted to

write about the ubiquitous
you that lives in my poems—
I started to write this because

trains remind me of
you but I thought of trains
first because I missed mine

and I have to wait the hours
late as a habit and sleepy
as a rabbit aching for a

home! So maybe that's why
the poem turned up
and spoke in a hurry

to get to places I try not
to yearn for and where
trains can never take me.

one-way

for justin

once upon a time we were like the toddlers
marching past the other side of your one-way
glass room of art and they couldn't see you
smile for that second with such happiness

your face almost fit in with your paintings
with their airbrushed emotion which made
me wonder why we grow up to love children
so when surely it isn't an art that is past to be

as hungry as them for the next meal and the
next story to hear though i guess we both are
halfway out of the door though we do think
we will come back to this place again some day

but do you even remember how way before
we knew we could leave the only porridge
we imagined Goldilocks could want from bears
had to be century egg pork (oh can we buy some

from the market next door please) and we didn't know
it was first an old woman who was stuck in the story
made younger with time but it's too hot to remember so
can we please buy some time from the market next door?

Place

Forget disgrace – forget forgetting. Let's go
somewhere else to die, where eagles don't draw
blood nor write, where nobody cares
for romantic birds other than the truth
that some do sing. Where nobody insists
that the metaphor is a lie, even if you too
say your wish to die is a metaphor. Let's go
somewhere else, wherever it is it will be
quieter than my city, livelier than your country-
side with sound, smell, sight, sea, oh pray
let's run till we ache, run till we remember
we have forgotten, run till I begin
to write about you again.

Apostrophe

*one other little punctuation mark one can have feelings about
and that is the apostrophe for possession*

~Gertrude Stein

The space between us is where
we begin. Having ended there
once I find myself well-acquainted
with distance and the unspoken
letters that join and shape
these disparate semblances of
truth: My voice, condensing into crashes
of consonants. Fingertips, gracing the keys
that mark an ache spanning more
than an octave. Text, a daily send-off
on disembodied trains across
cities. Apart, I sit in the quiet cabin
that hugs so many
presences unvoiced, each seat a mark
of holding back. I rest my arm
on things which divide us, look out
the window and see speed
clipping the landscape like a hungry
lover and suddenly riding the smooth
curve of the apostrophe's impatience
I'm there, he's mine,
it's time.