

singing words



by tom shute

i say hello

as you mumble no one hears
me to a thin cotton top

and the sound of stranger's chatter
reverberates through pastel
pink plaster walls

as you turn back upon
the thoughts you sing
to loose-leaf paper

the time my family felt like a shrinking box

i feel that you are hurting me
falls out my floral ear
every few days

try to hold it steady
but it blows as heavy
in the wind
as flowers in a garden

and my parents try to make room
by dancing in a different way

but i feel my feet get sore
every time i try to join them
on the wooden floorboards
of my family's sighing home

so begin wondering
how to make a flower
grow out of a boy slumped
over on a sidewalk



made me want that time when we were kids.

dad on towel reading smoking
sun-cream painting
black haired
white skinny legs

mum on sand blue white
striped towel watching
bright eyed red-haired
pink-skinned boys

stammering
out from beach



pronouns come after the things

i step into a room full of people
etching pronouns delicately
onto their chests

and begin wondering how to stitch
“i am human”

onto a little white nametag
using scalpel/sewing machine
chisel/paintbrush
toothpick/language
i’m not sure exists



about a person that are beautiful.

he laughs raindrops
and honeysuckle

tells me she likes badminton
and seeing skyscrapers
blend in with trees

thinks they smell like peppermint tea
brewed last night
still somehow warm

and talks with a lisp
that matches both the dimple
on his right cheek
the creases
on her forehead
and the goofy way they smile
with their eyes half shut



you saw your girlfriend in a moment
the way your girlfriend reads a book:
her left hand curled around
her left cheek
body pressed inside
a sleeping bag
eyes moving slowly quickly
not at all
like a baby possum learning
how to fall asleep



your ex was once the center of.

the way your ex reads a book:

surely
her left hand folds
each page softly
the same way her voice sounded
hazy-drunk and half asleep

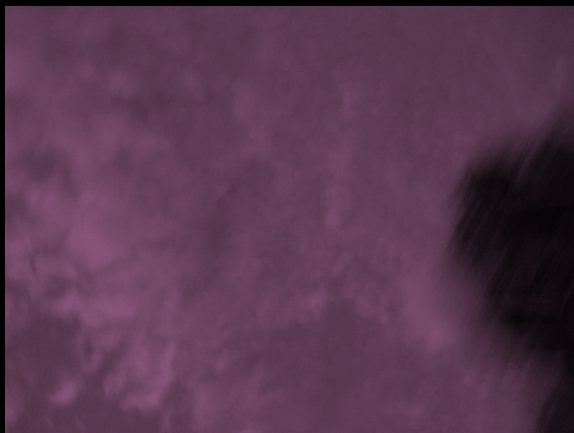
surely
she turns the pages like
she tore her clothes off
in the thin cream hallway
of her little apartment
when it was hot outside

surely
she doesn't turn the pages at all
just stands staring
at black words printed
on white pages



every part of her that i have hurt

the fact that i mistook
the body sighing *no*
for a thousand little blackbirds
singing love me from above



i will learn to cradle softly.

does not make up for the mistake
nor the pain painted over it like
little black flowers dying
in a chubby grey vase

though it does replace a hot glaring sun
with a tree the colour of
her mother's eyes

covers the vase in the outlines of
her favorite stolen earrings

and colors that god-awful night in
silver shining stars that
black flowers dance
music to



the way the sky got hot reminds you

1. you drive in the red mazda nanna gave
your mum
just before she died
to a little camping spot lined with trees
that sing the river's names

2. you drive in the red mazda nanna gave
your mum
just before she died
to a liquorland in colac
where you buy cheap red tawny
and check red flames spreading
on that little white screen

3. you drive in the red mazda nanna gave
your mum
just before she died
with drunk hands and the possibility
of that camping spot lined with trees
that sing the river's names
burning down in the night



of the way we had to hide inside our walls.

1. your mum's face in a mask
at the volunteer clinic
where a small boy coughs like an angel
wounded by love's tough bite

2. big window streets full
of ever growing 'sorry's

3. your bed calling louder
than an alligator with a pot
full of deep black tea

4. you walk the block around your
house just long enough to
listen to yourself breathe



you

you are born named kissed on the forehead
and wrapped up in a body that smells like
fresh-puckered wonders

then grow in the knowledge that there
are rules bigger than yourself:
that a tree should never talk
a sandwich should never be used
as a coat-hanger a human is always only
ever themselves and the world is the place
where you will grow into a memory

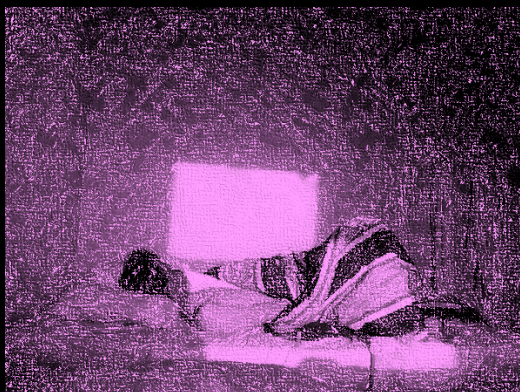
so by the time that you have pulled
a leaf from every tree that cannot
hear you speak

you are a tattered rule book naked
by the doorway where we met
and i am playing your young you's laugh
just loud enough for you to hear
yourself sing



and i are no different.

suppose i have a fourth dimension:
the part of me that's only there
when i rest flowers on my cheeks



quiet calm

you smile and say thank you
to the crabs
that were on this beach
whilst you were sleeping

for making soft pebble sand
crumbling as you walk back
to the silver quiet
car

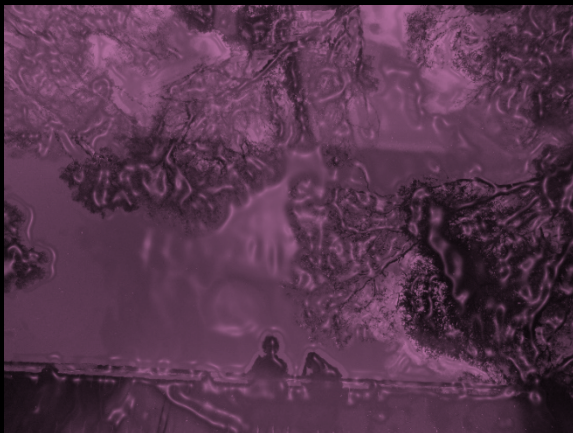


can still unfold within this city.

waking
eyes open earlier
than the red letters on the alarm clock
expected them to

waking
eyes peer
through big glass doors
at red-headed skies
stretching into mornings
as you lay

waking
eyes calm
water boiling
in the silver quiet
kettle

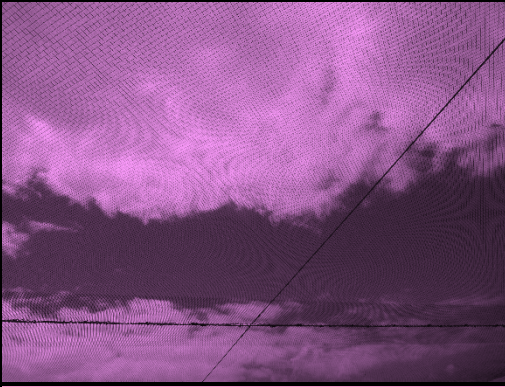


everything that we remember

she's a photo
seventeen and smiling
my three-year-old face and hair bright red
and covered in a bucket hat
my mother places on my head
with sun-leathered hands

she's a moment
her three-year-old son stomping
on garden plants
her wind-chime laughter drifting
down the hallway

and she's sun
pouring through big green
leafy trees whose trunks
i spell her name on
with pastel pink lips

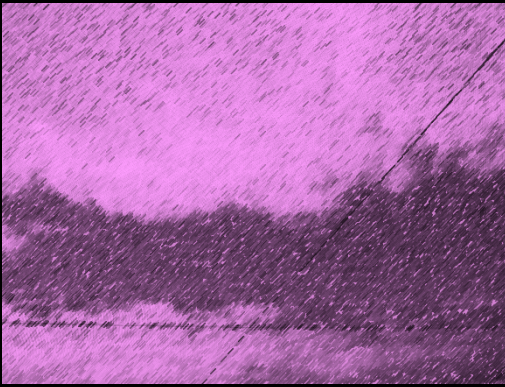


we may one day soon forget.

an image of my grandma
smiling cookies that she passed
from wrinkly fingers to my
young boy palms the moment
that my grandad left the room
with a stern finger wagging
loving no's

an image through which
i remember this panna cotta
woman with a red wood
nose and the posture
of a big white swan

an image too real
to even exist





but that doesn't mean that this life can't be as beautiful

sometimes when you laugh
i catch it with my toes
sometimes when i shout
you listen to it smiling

never do i blame you
for the times when you are stone
never do you blame me
for the times when i carve puddles

always do we miss
each other's words
and always do we turn
them into songs

as the singing words between your ears.



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when you're not ready to say goodbye.

i say it anyway

leave our loose-leaf paper hanging by
a hook on a pastel pink plaster wall

take your hand leave this room
as gently as nighttime rain
leaves morning dew

and walk you home
through a world as beautifully

plain as lemon-colored snow
underneath skier boots wandering
down misty colored ski-tracks
to urinate