

Maybe Flowers Would Grow Soon

I like to walk.¹ This comes from my mom. Her legs are longer than mine, but when we walk together they do not cover more area than mine do. I know this must be some type of magic, miracle, resulting from our closeness. I first discovered it in the sixth grade when we hiked together in Wyoming, in Yellowstone, and our feet fell next to each other at every step.

When people, my mom, me, get upset, walking is sometimes the only answer. Things will seem especially wrong and we will put down our wine. This always means trouble, to put down our wine. We pull out the leash. We say, *Come on, Commiskey*. He gets very excited, running around the house, jumping into our laps. My mom likes to walk for miles when the winter finally ends.² We walk in the bright, bright sun and we do not bring any sunglasses, we let it hit our eyes. We let it in. A horrible-ness lifts when the tops of our heads warm up, and then our shoulders, and then the rest.

It is hard to pretend that seasonal depression does not affect you when you are already sad, sensitive, crumbling at the touch.

Winter lasts years³ and then it is over.⁴

1. you & i had been walking all day but this was different. this was cleaner. our first mistake was to think things would be simple on the beach that day. we should have known better. but we have the same favorite sound: waves crashing when it is very quiet & we put our bags where the ice had already melted & dried &

2. maybe flowers would grow soon.

3. we have just done the math & discovered that we have been together for twenty-one months. i say our relationship could have a drink & you say *no*, you say *our relationship is a baby*. we are just those parents who look at this perfect little baby they have somehow brought into a world they do not feel is ready for it yet & refer to this life in months. the baby is two.

4. when i talk to m. about you i refer to it as an unreal amount of time. a surreal amount of time. she has just broken up with her boyfriend because he became apathetic & i tell her the truth: i cannot imagine an ending to this but sometimes it appears in dreams & i wake up so cold.

Men do not say anything to me when I walk with my mom. They look, but this is different because I am very good at blocking out, at being oblivious to, attention of any quiet variety. Today I am walking alone; my mom cannot always come to meet me simply for a walk. We do not live together anymore.⁵

When I am alone they tell me they like my body like popsicles on their tongues, or are imagining me with a popsicle on my tongue. Girls don't say anything, that's safer, that's the way to not get hurt. Winter⁶ has just ended, I am the first woman they have seen in a skirt without tights this year. I am all bare legs. I am newly shaven. They want to know if I need a sample, or any help out of this outfit. I wish I was no longer wearing it, the skirt, my skin, but neither falls off me the way I hope it will.

I am not sure if I was born to be very small or if they, men, men like this, made me this way.

I am trying to take up more space with my mouth. My body⁷ is not very intimidating, but I am learning how to manipulate other factors. I do not know how to be quiet unless I am being degraded.

Once a man came up to us at the beach, B. and me. He came up to us and said he had seen us kissing earlier. That it had been beautiful. It had been, but that is not the point. He made a shadow over my sun while we were reading poetry and he offered to pay us money, to buy us dinner, for a picture of that moment. Before then, my harassment had always happened as I walked, it had always been a passing moment, there and then, easily, not. Queerness takes away that simplicity. It

5. sometimes when i look at you i feel a sudden need to become a blanket. you laugh because i am always trying to cling to you but i am really just keeping you warm. i am really just giving you my heat. it was like that on the beach, with the bunny.

6. someone else had found it before you, & they had wanted to keep it warm. they had draped it in a baby blanket.

7. the body is too far away, stuck on ice that wants so badly to slip, melt into the water, to touch with our hands, but you want to put the little body into the lake. i say *won't it be cold?* & you say *that doesn't really matter anymore*. you ask me to stay with our backpacks while you search for something to push the bunny into a resting place. you find a stick you think will help the bunny & you stretch & stretch until we both know that your limbs are not as long as mine. until i have stood up to take the stick out of your hands, gently, the only way i know how.

makes me more vulnerable,⁸ strangely approachable, in a way I had not been before.

People continue to approach and ask us for favors. To be our third. To join in. To get some of that. For us to please not stop doing what we are doing. When we do stop, I hope it hurts them because I am stopping B. from breaking⁹ noses.

I do not tell my mom about this sort of thing. She does not understand me, my queerness, even though she tries. She worries that it will hurt me to be un-straight, it will make the world¹⁰ so much harder to get through when I am dating not-men. She worries it will negatively affect my life, and I have no way of explaining that it does and it does not. That it lets me take a hammer to things she will never want to take a hammer to; that that is both good and bad for me. That it is just me.

I have learned, so quickly, my own strength, since realizing my sexuality. This is because there is only a certain amount of degradation a person can take before they notice that it is happening, that it is not flattery, but dangerous. After that realization, we get angrier and tenderer all at once. Raw.

Girls don't say anything, that's safer, that's the way to not get hurt.

But I bought pepper spray a year ago. I bought it and put it in my purse the way I would put a cookie in my purse, gingerly, so it did not crumble.¹¹ I will not have to say a word to use it. I will just have to feel adequately threatened.

8. i have to straddle on ice to touch the stick to the tiny body, to the blanket over it. & i nudge until i feel the weight of resistance.

9. weight which once lived. it was too much.

10. when i put the stick down, my hand shakes & it slides into the lake so easily. right past the bunny in its blankie. when we hear it hit the water, everything in me needs to get out.

11. we hold hands over the bunny. over the ridge of ice the bunny will not move from. we stand & hold hands the way we have seen people do these things at funerals in movies, as if we are praying together. neither of us knows what it is to pray but your hand is warm & mine is cold & together this makes some sort of balance. *people and rabbits have loved you, we will continue to love you.* you said that while i tried not to cry again & i know

Central Illinois is different from Chicago. Corn grows everywhere. My mom grew¹² there, the way plants do, seemingly slowly, but when she compares pictures, things have changed so much. In this way, things were not so different there. But she learned things differently, like how to deal with men. She learned because her stepfather treated her mother, my grandmother, like an object until she punched him in the jaw.

I have never hit anyone but I have thought about it. I have thought about that scene in *Heathers* where Winona Ryder lights her cigarette with Christian Slater's exploding body. My mom told me for the first time about the punch after my grandmother had already died. She told me when I came home crying about a boy who made my insides a type of fire that I could not identify as good or bad. She told me so I knew that I had options; so I knew other things too.

I have always been given the impression that I am my own.¹³

12. what we are doing will stay in present tense until one of us goes into the lake.

13. in the dark so many months later, you tell me that you want to spend time living on both coasts, but that you are like an elephant. when you feel you are going to die, you will return to the midwest, to where you were born. you want to be ashes & you want to be in the lake you have always known.