

Perfect Day

Of course, you'll walk down the aisle, beaming at the congregation, doing your best to make it look like you actually want to be there, swinging your gaze from the eyes of the crowd to the stained glass windows, or the great pool of holy water in front of the altar, or the marble floors that shine and pop with every step, and you'll feel the beads of sweat as they drip from your father's cold, clammy hand as he wheels his little wheelchair along next to you, both of you going as slowly as possible so that the other can keep up – or, maybe so your father can smile heartily at each and every guest as he rolls by, as if the beautiful blonde woman in the white dress next to him is a precious show-and-tell item, never before revealed to the world, and in turn, each and every guest can return the gesture without the strained wrinkles or evaporating hair – that is, except for the herd of children that you pass by who don't smile back, only because their plastic racecars are too busy burning rubber on the mahogany of the pew and the worn covers of the worship manuals, and as your father's gaze leaves them to their antics and the cars struggle to find their track, he'll turn to you with glittering eyes and joke about how he wants to go back to the back of the cathedral, to the inception of the aisle, and he wants to try the walk again, only standing up this time – after all, the cameraman's roll of footage won't look like what he envisioned again and again in his mind, but he'll drop his jests by the third row of pews, because that's when your eyes will lock with another gaze: the suited man beside the great lake of holy water, his smile gentle and warm like a tranquil morning sun as you creep up to the territory of the altar, and he'll look the dress he bought you up and down – expensive, pale,

backless, just like you – while he adjusts his pressed black suit, one which you won't be able to pick out a single wrinkle on, and after a couple moments of shriveling under his gaze, you'll realize that another all-too-familiar face is smiling at you from the front row of pews, and your gaze will turn to him – not him, *him* – and you'll stare at the way he's pulled his sheepish curly hair out of his eyes and reigned it back, wondering if you've ever seen him clean up this much, or this well – not in the pictures from Amsterdam, or Sydney, and certainly not Dubai – in fact, not anywhere he travelled with the band – and you'll wonder if he still smells the same way that his hotel room did last night, like buttery crushed soap and wrinkled drier sheets, and if his hands still sport the same coarse smoothness as when he peeled your dress off, and if he still tastes like the same expensive wine that you spent two hours – straight – spinning like a centrifuge in your glass, and as your mind starts to move deeper into the bed, burying itself like your face in the pillow, you'll bite your tongue and feverishly snip apart the ropework that binds your eyes to his, because at this point, you'll be moments from standing before the groom, and now you'll be able to see that he really doesn't have a single wrinkle upon him, and your father will shift to a halt as if there's a red traffic light hanging above the altar, or an invisible barrier that prevents him from rolling any farther along, and he'll pull your ear down to his cracked lips and relay, again, how proud of you he is, how delighted he is that you've finally found a man that can take care of you, a man who can use his wealth and love and status to support you, and then your father's hand will slip from yours as he changes direction and wheels his squeaking steel throne to the single designated 'RESERVED FOR FAMILY OF THE BRIDE' spot, its only use to seat his suit jacket as he struggles out of it, folds it carefully, and sets it on the pew under the sign, but at this point, your attention will have left him – you'll be more focused on the man directly in front of you who, in thirty-two minutes, will be your husband, and the man a short distance away from

you who, in thirty-two minutes, will not be your husband, but when you look at it reasonably, like you've told yourself countless times to, you can see they're two sides of the same coin – one polished, and smooth, and reliable – a best foot forward – and the other mysterious, and wonderful, and rolling, rolling away, spinning on its side away from you until it's someplace far out of reach – it's like a beautiful flower you've been waiting on to bloom, waiting and waiting and waiting, only to realize that it never will, probably not in your lifetime, and certainly not in your father's flailing lifetime; the words will be quick, as if they're speeding you toward your fate, and in no time you'll be holding a pair of unbelievably smooth hands and choking out your vows – *I do*, you'll say, but the words won't echo in your head in that order – you'll be prepared to plaster on a smile like you're a member of one of the stained glass windows that shines down on your face, just to make your act passable, to make it believable as the starry-eyed priest next to you fuses the two of you together like he's a scientist shaping a new species, but when he finishes reciting the binding incantations, you'll realize you no longer have command over yourself – not to smile, not to say “I love you,” not to lean forward and imagine the expensive wine again, spinning, spinning – and your body will be floating, sailing away like an angel, toward the painted ceiling where cherubs that would rival Michelangelo's twist and dance, and the congregation will gasp as you tilt, their eyes will tear themselves from hymnals and windows and watches and phones, and for the briefest of moments, even the plastic cars will stop racing over the worship books, and his eyes, and *his* eyes will be all you can watch as you stumble in a failed attempt to catch yourself, eyes brimming with surprise and wonder, and your golden head, your neatly-tied bun will hit the surface of the holy water lake like a fair little porcelain hailstone, and you'll sink, deep down into endless depths, an infinite expanse of blue that rivals the deepest ocean floor, sailing down with your glittering white dress puffing out in all directions

like an elegant jellyfish, your newfound angel wings donated to the cherubs above, your breaths quickening and slowing as you feel drowned in thousands of cold, clammy hands, hands that you recognize, that pull you down, deeper and deeper, until the stained light that shines on the surface is gone, hands that are as cold as the holy water itself, that chill you to your very bones – cold, so very cold...

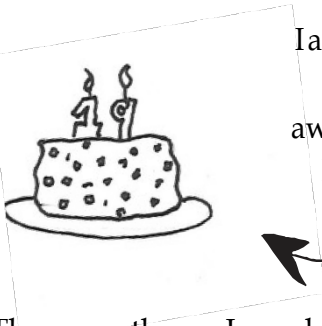
treasure

a temporary strain of paper cranes undulates in uncertainty,
accepts a fate of wind-tattered wings and
fraying strings, people say
how *delicate* how *lovely* how *fleeting* their beauty and I break.

survival demands isolation,
demands preservation by the only knowing hands
that bide their obligation of daily tending to endless needs,
all fifteen cautious birds spinning on a red center thread

it is not lovely to fall apart in the breeze
or a look in her eye or a brush of a limb or a sneeze.

Cakes of Significance

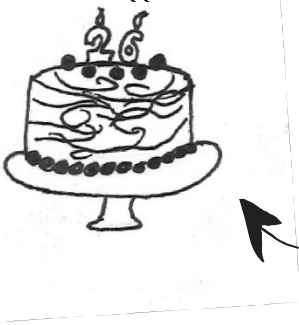


I am seventeen years old. We are celebrating the 19th anniversary of your birth with a modest fete in your two bedroom apartment. My once dormant paint set has been awoken to make a watercolor skyline of the town in which you were born. I've not yet learned to bake and your funfetti cake came from a box. We get high and hold each other in your bed.

Three months ago I gave birth to our first child and I am entering my nineteenth year of life. We feel isolated from our prior friendships and everything is both beginning and caving in around us. We buy a supermarket ice cream cake and eat it on the living room floor with our son. I am disappointed with my life but not with you (though I know it seems that way). You unfairly bear the brunt of my anguish. I am a child and I have not yet found my words.

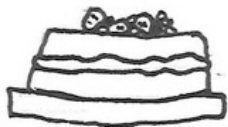


{{ insert every year that I made, but can't recall, your birthday cake }}
{{ insert every year and every cake that I made for our children's birthday }}



You are turning 26, we own a home together. We have two children now. I have made you a Chocolate Malted Milk Ball Cake. We are trying to hold everything together.

I don't know it yet, but this will be the last cake I make for you as your partner. A homemade ice cream cake. Even the ice cream was made in our modest kitchen because your favorite is the one I make using store-bought chocolate and cream cookies. Our closest friends come over for dinner and remark on how much effort the cake must have been. "Nothing is too much to celebrate the person you love most in the world." I made that statement in complete honesty which is hard to believe considering I'll move out in less than a year.



I make a berry blitz cake for a friend. He will aggressively and inappropriately pursue me while I am married. I will cave to this pressure and allow myself to get swept up in the concept of a life unlike the one I live. I convince myself that he "sees me." But you and I we were children together. Coming of age together created an intimacy I undervalued. Freedom and passion are not the same as intimacy.

We no longer live under the same roof. I still love you. I am worried about you. I am at fault. It is Halloween and I am the monster of our present reality. I bring you a cake. A peace offering. A plea for your love and forgiveness.



I've met someone new. Someone I'd like to impress. I make them a vegan birthday cake decorated with candles that sparkle and figurines from his favorite childhood movie. This man will waste three years of my life.

I heard secondhand that she made your cake this year. I don't think I will ever bake for you again. I don't know what it looked like. What it tasted like. I have to close my eyes to see your face. The way it was when we were still children together.

Sitting in the sun by the water, your hair blowing in the wind and tickling my lips as we kiss. There is something wrong with me, I mistakenly assume that the men I encounter now will have your integrity. I keep pouring salt in the wound.

