

GRIEF

I

I want to say something about grief. In many ways I feel familiar with grief. The grief of my mother that turned her feral - leaving her on a wooden pallet, drunk behind her house, freezing to death. Grief of my grandmother, grief of her sisters. Grief of Marie, a scream ripping through the dark night as she learned her cousin had committed suicide. Distant. I already knew. We already knew. Grief has a sound, you will make a sound as you are ripped from the arms of who you used to be, and as you are birthed into the world, again. The grief of Marie, her mother dying. "Rakel you have to come now, she's dying". "Come now, they are dying". There were years of hearing that message over and over. It became a drill. The phone call. Move. Now. They are dying. Release, everything. "There is no order here and nothing can be planned". I looked at my friend, and I knew grief is something that stays and it will make a home in you, and you will be communing with something else. We were so young. I felt I could do nothing. You will carry an ever changing wound and you will have to choose. It is a call to live or one to die with those you already lost. I want you to know that grief becomes an intimate friend. It becomes a breast from which you drink the milk of life. It comes and gives you purpose, for there must be purpose to loss if we are to live with grief. And in the future it will call upon its family and it will grow in numbers, and you will get more phone calls, and you will have to run. You will have to make the terrible journey in the morning, getting a lift to the train station, crying and drunk, with your friend who hitch-hiked to see you, all night she drove with strangers to see you, and now you make the journey to see your dying father and turn off his life support. Now she puts her arm around you as you drink a beer in the harsh morning light and you grin, trying to see through the tears that keep coming from your eyes. Outside the window, the city is rolling past. You return two weeks later, you have been awake for three days. You sit with your friend on the asphalt and make a toast to all of those you have lost - you feel insane, and you are full of hot despair. It tastes like ashes and salt on your tongue. Your skin feels dry, and your fingers smell like crusted nicotine. It is like a shell on your fingers. You are 22 years old, the world is without meaning, and it is the beginning of a life with grief and it will give you purpose. You will forge purpose from this and you will learn how to forge purpose from other losses - and you will live.

II

And years later, your grief will bloom as a flower, suddenly and unexpectedly. You will be, as most other days, staring at this hard egg you have been carrying under your heart. This hard, stone egg that has become your heart. This ever changing wondrous egg, that sometimes is hard as stone and sometimes is a wound, a portal to endless gifts and endless pain, and one day it will bloom, like a seed that was planted in blood. A seed that must have a sacrifice to grow, and it blooms. It is the sound of weeping, it is the knowledge of your death, it is the gratitude for knowing the face of death, for the gifts that death has brought you, and what it will continue to bring you. It is the box of Pandora, and releases it's last gift, of many terrible gifts, and it is gratitude and it is an understanding that this is how life must be, that everything must die, that there can be no purpose without death. And there can be no art and no beauty and no love and no creation without death. And morals have no power in this realm. Judgement has no

power in this realm. You sit at a desk in your home country, to which you have returned. You weep. You are 30 years old.

III

It is a blossom like a sudden jolt of ecstasy and you remember the night you came alive. You remember a sudden rush of unknown desire. You remember pushing some guy into Marie's tree house, carrying madrasas, closing the door, and finally, immediately, throwing yourself at him. Every fiber of your body, stifled with responsibility for all of those years, craves to be touched and to be free. You know you desire his privilege, his gender, the mask of his carefree rambler - to rip it off through the mysterious act of transgression, and to possess it.

Not him, but everything that has been taken from you. You make love in the tree house, meters away from your trailer where you lived during high school. Where you were bald and crazy, and connected to an inner flame, that burned bright and big. You are thrilled to be desired and to want to be desired. To grow bigger than the sun and to consume the stranger.

IV

You know you are not in love, but you cannot forget him and in the months to come you are drunk, crazy. You throw yourself at strangers, you are homeless, you move away, you wish to die, you want to escape the flame as it was lit, and you remember why you withdrew into the mundane for all of those years. The light is bright and it hurts. You remember always running through the city, food in hand, jumping on the bus, living in a small dirty apartment on the outskirts of the city. Your roommate smokes millions of cigarettes, you are always angry and agitated. You starve yourself because you have no money. Your head is on fire and you and you feel manic. You cry in bed, drunk, curled up in the sheet. You want to break apart so you transgress all your fears, you wonder if you will become an alcoholic like your mother and you scream in wounded fury - you are screaming at the universe and it answers "you will live". You don't know how to hold this feeling, it is tearing you apart. You tell everyone you are having a crisis, you tell them who you sleep with, when you masturbate. You tell them not to worry. You arrive late to their parties and burst out "SORRY I'M LATE BUT I WAS MASTURBATING AND SCREAMING THE NAME OF THE STRANGER I CAN'T FORGET". You tell them there is a rhythm to life and that you are being called. You make a vow: You will never return to the steel pipes you stuffed yourself with, the rigid structures of forgetting, and you will listen when you are called.

V

You are Demeter scorching the earth. You are Aphrodite, hungry and terrifying. In grief you give birth to Eros and it is Eros that destroys you and Eros that saves you. It is Eros that pulls you closer to life and it is Eros you obey.

VI

Grief is the feeling you carried with you in your stomach, the day you left your mother's house. You brought that grief with you out into the world. Grief is a child you had. Grief is the dark waters that dwell inside of you. Grief is the silhouette of a great whale that moves in your waters. Grief is an ocean at night, that moves inside of you. Grief is the shadow of a child you

are carrying, that will never be, the shadow that simply clings to you. Grief is the shadows of the girls before you, lined up in grieving wombs. Grief is your mother walking with the tracks from her house to her childhood friend, a line pointing to the horizon. You see her in your mind's eye, and it makes you cry in hard and ugly sobs. Grief is your mother being beaten. Grief is your mother leaving the house when she was a child. Grief is the never ending line of girls leaving their houses, running from the violence that drove them out.

VII

You are 13, you spend all day packing your things. Now you see how young you were, how absurd is it to see yourself pack a bag of diaries that talk of school crushes. You don't want to see these things anymore, but you will have to look at this scene. You must witness yourself in your searing pain, for no one else can do it for you. The sun is dimming, you know you will have to leave soon to catch the train. The train goes to your farther and you will have to walk through the dark with your bag. It is so big and too big for you. What do you bring when you leave someone you love? You meet your mother in the door, she is heavy with shame. She knows you are leaving because she can't stop hurting you. In that moment she is fragile, you feel awkward, as if you have suddenly grown to be much older and you don't know how to stand there and be this old. The words are just dangling there, in between the two of you, and no one can hold them, for they are true and too painful to speak. Love becomes unbearable and threatens to crush you, so you leave. You are the last gift, released from Pandora's box. You are Eve leaving the garden. You are the sweetest drop of honey. You are Orpheus leaving Hades and you turn to look at your mother, and you see her, being dragged back to the underworld. You roam the earth alone.