

In the Air a Shining Heart

by Lydia Copeland

In the air a shining heart, wet lungs releasing and releasing, your sweet milk head, your pulsating skin. Only an inch separates us. A shimmer of hot air trembles like boiling water above the highway. There are seeds floating in the sky. These things will become other things. A plume of purple. An orange wing. A hazel eye. A grain of rice. In the air, a curl of baby hair, a pale face and flushed cheeks, a shred of coconut in the palm of my hand. We both wonder where I'm going. I've been to the ocean and felt my body sink away. I've stood against the skyline with the other honeymooners and let the man I love kiss each button of my shirt, down to the very x of thread. I've felt his hand beneath the hem of my skirt warm as a tongue. I've lived alone in old and dark houses. Now I drive. Now I stop in towns that are still wet behind the ears. I eat their lunches and sleep in their beds. I swallow their water. I find their high schools and walk the track fields at night. The stadium lights shine above bleachers lighting the new grasses and chain link fences. The mornings all mingle together. The same pillowcases, the same cups of coffee, the same cool engine, the same drip of oil. In the air, the pitch of a muted television, sheets that smell like baking bread. A boy named Ezra. A boy named Gwyn. I try these things on for you to see how they fit, to see who is loose around the edges and who is like a glove. Who comes home for dinner and who plays in traffic? The corn is tossing in the field along the road. Beneath the green and white silk, silver beads gleam like rows of teeth, like the pearls that will one day swell from your mouth. There will be a jar of light by your bed, curtains that let the seasons into the room, a closet big enough to hide inside. You will rub your cheek against the tip of your shirt collar. You will wipe dirty hands into the carpet. You will sleep off sickness in this room. In the air a heat grows and water drips from lips. I drive until I hear *Nights in White Satin* twice on the radio. The different stations fade into static then appear again clean and new. There are fields and orchards on either side of me. The farmers here

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watch for deer in their crops. The deer always come in groups, a doe and two fawns or several does and no fawns. They come soft in the night through blanketed woods to eat winter squash and green beans from the vine. The farmers here listen for foxes. They have memorized the sound of an arched back. They know red and they know silver. They install bat houses and little irrigation systems made from upside down soda liters. Their tomatoes are perfect red globes. Their cucumbers swell with wet flesh and flat white seeds. When I drive I don't think about these things. I don't see the golden apples or the pea pods. Instead I taste them at the end of the day when I'm resting on a bed in an overly cool room. My eyes are closed and then there is the shape of grapes and warm patches of light. In the air, all the pills lined up on the edge of my mother's sink, a soft white hand with pretty pink nails. A spare key, a blank expression, the smell of a hot iron. There are two notes, one old and one new. The new note is like poetry. The old note is straight to the point. I remember thin wrists and dangling bracelets, all the dresses laid out on the bedspread, the shoes that matched even though no one would see them. In the air, alligators hide in the marsh, their eyes never blinking. Dust coats the skin. Plants grow under water, under fake oceans and wash up limp and soggy in some dark place on a fake beach. My skin stretches until I can see the bottom. You grow tight like a muscle. The pressure of your body trips me up, makes me think I can't walk a straight line. Only a few moments separate us. In the air, nameless things or forgotten names. Soon it will be ten years since the words were written out and the door was broken down. No one knows what makes the body shudder. We think cold, we think pain. We think the blackness that spreads inside when someone leaves. I was alone then in a room with two beds and a window. I used to watch the heli-pad lights on the hospital roof. They flashed green, then white, then orange. The tricolors of some country's flag. In those days that followed, I didn't wear a seatbelt. I didn't look for oncoming traffic. I didn't eat. I was mostly bones. And black sank like a rock into the pit of me, always in the back seats of cars watching the naked trees reel by, listening to someone else's

favorite song. In the end, the relatives will cheer. They will remark on your opened eyes and how you seem to take everything in and check it off a secret list. *Things Never Seen by This Here Boy*. One night we will wait for your fever to break. We'll place wet cloths on your forehead. We'll brush the drops of sweat from your nose. One day you will cry and cry until the sound coming out of you is only a soft whimper that no one can hear. One day you will ask me if animals can live inside of us. You will see a blue eye like a cat's looking back at you when you rub your eyelids at night. You will wonder what is real and what is imagined. You will wonder if animals watch you when you sleep, if they follow you into dreams. I will tell you only what I remember, that there are habits impossible to break and that sometimes the essence of you doesn't like to use the telephone or put the dishes away, and the only things that live inside us are histories that rise and sink and shift in bed with you at night. They wait like promises in towns not yet visited, in your taste, in the pages of a book. Eventually, you will forget that the milk is more water than cream. You will remember it as a sweet cordial in your mouth, but one day something will remind you. It will be a mood in the air, a slow evaporation lifting like a veil. It will be cold sun on a sidewalk, a cloud of breath. People in their houses will look out and look into you. You will walk with your arms crossed over your chest and a black dog following behind you. You with your books and new sneakers. You with your round face and chocolate eyes singing and singing.

