

Life of Sensations

Kelly Spong

A Computer Could Never Write Poetry

A typewriter could write poetry.
It feels the imprint of the letters being thought
the punch on the keys
against the clean sheet
and leaves an imprint.
It reacts with sound,
proud and proving it's worth.
But not a computer.
It's programmed to remain silent,
not to feel, not to last.
And sometimes,
we are too.

Transposition of the Great Vessels

A mother's greatest fear-- not becoming a mother--crept in like dirt in an opened wound. Pray for no infection and maybe not a physical scar; nobody makes it without some reminder. But the rip they tore down her stomach is for life, whether Michael was or not.

That fall, people worried. Could the winter of his life come before the spring—before he'd even have a chance to bud. Maybe breathing would start, rush in on the coattails of some winds and brush away the cold.

My father will fight for you like the sun wrestles for the shade, beating hard and warm. And he brawled with every doctor he had to. I'm not sure a heart is supposed to look that way.

Hours passed like ice melting in the Arctic and people wondered if anything will ever turn out right. Will my freshly flourishing mother ever stop crying out and will my father ever stop blaming himself.

Bah-dump
Bah-dump
Dump-Bah

Three people, three heartbeats. My brother's written by a composer, not a doctor.

Not So Love Love Poem

And the night we were done, it snowed so that in the morning, white tried to preserve us, freeze us into the ground and show we were as real as grass, as messy as dirt and that flowers had nothing to do with it. No one could break into the cold hard earth no matter how hard I scratched the surface, tried to warm the terra firma with my body. But dirt never tasted so good and grass never smelled like it must have when God blanketed the earth, barren and empty with nobody for comfort. That morning, I just wanted to beat the sky for being blue, but not as blue as it was yesterday and scream at the sun for coming out, filling the earth with garish light because I couldn't feel my cheeks, pressed still to the ground, empty and hollow. I wanted to tear the night open with my bare hands so stars would gush and let all whose wings were clipped feel at home.

Painting

My mother the canvas; my father the paint; my brothers the artist and brush. That's where I come from. Crafted for capability, commissioned for college, taught I was capable of gripping the earth with glaze. Sometimes I attract frames who wrap themselves around me, who feel my oil based paint and who try to accent my diagonal strokes. With some, I feel like a Rembrandt, others like a two-year-olds finger painting. But frames cannot endure, and they're not what people come to see. You were the frame—I am the art.

Color Scheme

Some people were born in color, others in black and white. I'm a warm purple, and I hunt for the best compliment; a velvety blood to bring out passion, a low-key cobalt to relax me away. I find myself drawn to the blacks and whites. They make me pop like a character in a children's book. But what I really need is grey to have me calm and collected but pushed for more. Keep me an acrylic; I don't want to wash off.

Memories

People scrape memories in each other's heads with chisels and nails, pens and shovels. And I thought I saw you once in the supermarket, at the bus stop, in that bar we'd never been to, but they were just men with beards and dark glasses. They faded in and out like dreaming of your life all in one night—it couldn't all fit in eight hours of sleep and they all couldn't be you.

Read On

I read a lover once, thought I'd never put them down. A classic, people carried him around, waited to sputter some lines at a likely companion. I was no fountain, but I sat at my desk, wanting to feel things only Eve might have—innocent as an infant yet as powerful as rain—things that would tip the world upside down. But God had other plans. Time persisted; bones ached like the limbs of old trees, desperate to hold on to their yet-ripened fruit. I sat at my desk, a woman who never tromped through the streets backed up with people, who never found what it meant to hold someone's hand and feel the veins and wrinkles replace the chubby youthful fingers. I thought lovers only existed on the stains of inked pages, put back on the bookshelf to rot like fruit.

Daniel

There's a scar on each of us, carved long before I almost vomited in your car on our first date. Yours was manmade, on your chest. Mine on my elbow—but yours is better. Dad dropped me down a rocky hill at five. Mom grabbed me and cleaned my bloody arm in the women's public bathroom-- my howls echoed like a coyote's in a canyon. Most people don't even get to see your scar, let alone know of the bulged existence. Mine, fading fast, used to cause alarm without my permission. But I wish more people knew of that scar on your chest's life so that I could boast of our closeness and total lack of hiding what we don't want others to see, like a bald spot or missing teeth. Although I don't know Braille, if I were to have first composed the romantic idea of reading using hands and not eyes, that scar would mean "I love you" because like me, it sits at the bottom of your chest, curled up as close as God will allow, soaking in your experiences the best we can. I wanted to etch in Braille that scar and tell you; to vomit love all over you, but like my own scar, that need fades fast.

Cardboard Heart

On our first date-- to look at the stars together for the first time in the cemetery, to meet your best friend since the second grade-- I could open as easy as a parcel my mother mailed. I traveled far to where the dogs bark freely and the smoke never stops sifting through the vents. Take a knife, cut me like air. Inside are cramped in old songs I memorized and some heavy books at the bottom along with scraps of boyfriends past and a garden of relatives. You could use the leftovers to make a box fort where we could live with each other. No need to talk on the phone together until one in the morning or go ice skating and find out how terrified I am of hurting my right foot. We'd experience it, like letters and candy tucked away in envelopes and packages.

Sea Shell

On the beach, I pick up broken bits of shells—the untouchables—that not even people nor the sea will take. Bright pieces, they're worthless because their busted and impossible. But so many people could have a piece of something as pink as a newborn. Its greed, the need to have the whole, that leaves these pieces on the warm, wet specks. If only someone would take them home, stop searching for their missing parts- an imperfect yet striking shard of shell.

Maybe it Was

I was sure it was the apple that ripened autumn and took a nibble at nestled summer eves. It was the Iris that blossomed spring, bitten by a forceful winter rage. Maybe the sea sand caused summer to sleekly sweat. The snowflake, accused of keeping winter windows closed off from the trembling chill.

Imperative

Mark me up like an old poem I wrote once and left in bed, crumpled under my pillow waiting to be read. Build me like a monument dedicated to my father who founded me in reverent hopes and youthful imaginings of ball playing. Cover me in sprinkled soot so that I may never see the sun again. Bury me in thoughtless pleasures like fluffernutters and tic-tac-toe. Mourn me like daughters do their mothers, sometimes before they've passed.

Fighting the Good Fight

I wasn't sure which way to fall, up or down. Rain plummeted like tiny liquid knives. Wouldn't want a knife to leave a scar, that's too much commitment to a story I never believed in, about the little girl getting to play baseball and no one being harmed. I would pray for rain to bathe the infield, leave ponds in the outfield. They dragged me through the mud and the boys would repeat the things they heard their father's saying to their mothers cooped away in their bedroom. But the boys were parrots and the stains won't wash off.

Fine Dining

A man named Constantine opened a restaurant. Inside, pink everywhere, like the creation of morning. For breakfast, I ordered hope for women's equality. While waiting, I occupied my time with glances of decrepit Roman forums, hung like great tapestries about the room. The restaurant smelled of blood-- I never felt more at home. When hope for women finally arrived, it was light and airy, like a bit of wind someone caught from Mt. Olympus. So I seized my food, fearing it would float away and never reappear. The taste of softness filled my mouth and I swear I could smell daisies. Someone else should have this, so I turned to another guest, another and another, and each time this hope was turned away. They don't know what it means to share their progress with others. I took the rest outside to the beggars, the barbarians. Maybe they wanted in, but no one is sure. I find my place back inside—it was already lunchtime. I ordered the power to speak slow and soft, but convincingly. When it came, I knew why the room smelt of blood. The plate was flooding with it, velvet rose and steaming like a melting witch. I tangled my teeth through the gristle. No matter how hard to digest, such power was inviting me to enjoy a little longer. This I offered to no one; I should have ordered seconds. Time swam through people's minds and soon, dinner had come. At the suggestion of another diner, I ordered social change for the poor. And so we waited like Persephone waits for spring and I wondered if the beggars would come in for a bite—I knew I would share my meal this time. Everyone waited...

Dishwater

It's not like washing the dishes after a drunken Friday night. That guy who said he didn't have the time for you anymore, who drove nine hours to see you for the weekend and never talked to you again, who begged you to let him introduce you to his family, is as pitiful as thunder with no rain. And no, it's not all one person but after a while, all dreams become a river where we go to wash our matters away. Things don't wash off.

A Twinkle Turned to Matter

It's selfish to have children, but even to a star it is predictable. Some people just want clones of themselves for company, something to flaunt like a freshly cut diamond or a sparkling new car. It's not a child's fault; some parents try and keep their young cooped up in the corners of their personal achievements. But when presented with the early stages of life --an immature state of being-- a person can wonder if this need for preservation was really necessary. To stars, a child starts as a cloud of gas, mixing for fusion. To humans, a child is an infestation, sometimes a wish. And we try and make our children flawless, lovely, beaming like stars. Children are dreams we came up with during spring time while fusion stirred in our cores. We keep them close in order to protect them but in the end, masses of our wants leave us on the great exodus, pulled by gravity, toward adulthood. It didn't matter how we shined their shoes for Sunday morning, managed to catch that one particle of dust out of their eye. Even dreams, children, stars must grow up and die.

1920s Nostalgia

You are my mother's player piano—I never learned to play with my left but as long as I stayed in center, I plunked out some notes with my right. Vibrations and I'd wonder who was really making the sound, you or me. And at Christmas, I'd pull the pedals out and a ghost played; maybe it was Irving Berlin. But I've always wanted to keep you. Christmas still comes.

Geraldine

When she was a little girl, she'd hide Monopoly under her bed, slide it out when the rooms were dark and cold and play until slumber. To me, she is as old as the hawk who circles clouds, but I knew her younger—when she could feed and dress herself, when she played cards and laughed to the sky like a bright crimson cardinal. I wish she would have been a bird of prey all her life. Threatened to stay home, not the writer, just a woman in need of wedding and that's how she lived. She looks at me now, eyes barely lifted, hardly any color left. She wants to die, yet holds on like the pureed food stained to her forever pink floral top, the color of an exotic bird. Stay still, try and talk—I only just met you.

Light at the End of the Day

Some people fade in like shards of light and pierce through the cracks of your skin. Other people are gifted to you like your grandmother's silver comb or cookies with burnt bottoms. You didn't pick them, but they're yours-- old relatives who refuse to feel the light even in the blazing afternoon. And you wonder how old you must be so that light gleams brighter than the corona and warmer than chicken dinner.

Twinning

“What would you do if Patrick died?”

I'd be hollow, like there were no words left and so I'd say nothing.

Always a minute older, I thought he would die a minute before, waiting for me in death. By default, we would have the same amount of breathing in the straw-hats and lemonade that we had racing through slush and foliage.

I had great aunts, twins, a pair of nuns—Sister Celeste and Sister Celestine. When cast off to different parishes, both were grabbed by sickness. When returned to each other, both recovered. But loss doesn't always come in couplets and there was one less habit in the sanctuary. Heaven and Heavenly were parted. I bet she, twinless, still had trouble fumbling through her beads.

Barren, I'd be a gaping hole.

The Pit

I made this pit in the backyard of my mind and packed it with the shadows of a cool winter's night and shoveled in my troubles like fertilizer. Flooded, everyone saw me fall apart, a decomposing corpse. I burrowed even deeper and threw everything back inside. I'd dig during lessons, sitting at dinner, riding in the car—if I wasn't talking, I was digging. When I was really down, I'd race to that backyard just to peer into my hole, knowing I would feel even worse afterwards but wanting a reminder that things don't dissipate, they cling. And one time, my grandmother died, and instead of shoving just woes into the gape in the ground, I shoved the summer firefly hunts and the car ride games in too, so I might forget. If only I had been mining.

Take Me to the Land of Alaska

Snow lay dormant on the mountain peaks and my grandfather fell. Laughter—and then he got up. He left a snow angel. When I saw him in Alaska, I saw his death staring back at me, leaping from within his eyes and I was angry because I was useless. I'm still angry. But Anchorage looked a bit like heaven must and it was in that airport that we said our last so longs, his breath visible in the chill. The last time I saw him, he couldn't see or hear or move. A few minutes too late in Missouri, my father had just driven in.

May 24, 2002

In the fourth grade, I got the kind of sick that ought to give you a bucket and a mop. Grief made me vomit. I sat at every service wanting to die with her. She couldn't take me to the playground she built and now I was being punished while I continued a primrose without her sun. At the funeral, I held in my Saltines and Sprite in a back room of some peculiar church I would never see again, and so many people came to see her, like Mary had for Christ.

Mourn with Me

My sickly sparrow has died. She chirped in the distance for many a year, I heard her but few times. Why does not the world mourn with me? Why do the roots keep searching for water, the clouds glide through azure, why do babies wail out? We push the dying away, continue our survival, forget our natural endings. And she lay, wings spread and beak toward the sky as if just resting.

Silk Flowers

And we place fake flowers on graves; things that will never live, never die. Wind throws them, sun beats on their silk petals and steals color just like God robbed the color from you. But I would rather be a begonia, life in my roots and breathing, than to try and live forever. Children would have to visit you more, and life burns on. And people make fake flowers.