

Cross-Genre: Exploration of Voice
Short Pieces
By: Cosima Dovan

The Kiss

His hot onion breath slips down my throat and naps in my lungs. It will stay there forever and every other person I kiss will have to taste him too. His tongue propels into my mouth like a submarine and searches, searches, searches, flicking my teeth and licking my gums.

He takes a long swipe across my braces as if in preparation to break them off. My tongue extends like an olive branch, stretching like a rope. Unrolling, unfolding, I fold and unfold him. Paper tongue origami, I am a crane, a butterfly, a heart. We are like snakes choking the same mouse, tightening our grasp around slimy, squirming prey.

We lick each other's faces like unbroken dogs on drugs. I hold his tongue captive and it quivers like a popsicle come to life. Saliva is like conversation, we pass it back and forth and back and forth until it is brown and tastes like onions. The garbage juice of our bodies floods the deep, wide moat of our flesh. I spit it hard into the wet hole in his face.

What is a kiss if not a cackle to the kissee? A slow-motion, fast-paced spit contest. How can a toothbrush without bristles be so romantic? Sweet romance, sweet tongue war.

I move my tongue to the bassline of "Ain't No Sunshine." Someone get a flashlight, I think I found a cavity. I knock and I knock and it breaks and all the love goes bloody all over.

The Claustrophobic

When my dad leaves for Washington, I ride shotgun. I use the knobs on the door to push my seat up and flat as it can be. I feel better if my knees press against the glove compartment and my back is straight as a board. Maybe I am accustomed to him sitting there in front of me, with the seat far back as it can bend. There is no room for me to breathe when I am pressed against myself, folded like a picnic blanket in the backseat. I recreate the prison when he is away, moving all the lowest settings to their highest, so I am propped up like an eagle in a cage. It is the antithesis of claustrophobia. Comfort in the smallest of spaces.

My sister is claustrophobic. I have heard the rhythm of her heavy breathing a million times, and yet it won't ever feel familiar. Her body expands and contracts like stagefright in a paper bag, or an animal in the shadow of its predator.

When my sister was born, she was purple. They put her in the NICU for two weeks. Her body writhed with anger and stamina worthy of a forest fire. Something about it, pitiful and helpless, like an ant seconds after it has been flicked on its back. Too painful to watch but odd enough to peek at.

As she kicks at my mother's seat in the car, I watch her face flush from rose to purple. In the thick heat, she heaves. Like an exorcism, her neck flexes back and her voice sounds as if it is crawling through the smallest of spaces in her belly. I imagine us each in our own bubbles, my mom, my sister, and I. We watch her squirm under the seat belt, forming her body into sharp objects. She becomes a knife, scissors, a spoon, and we hold her toes to soften the edges. She kicks us away, bites the air, trying to break something that isn't there.

I press on the walls of my bubble, watching the fog of my breath stain my vision. Everything feels hot and sticky like a dessert melting in the sun. I curl into myself like pretzel dough ready for the oven. I bake and harden in the searing heat.

Lucy

Lucy's laugh lines are deep enough
to hold water,
cast blue shadows round her mouth.
Light bounces on her high cheekbones,
The hard edges soften
She is boney,
pointy,
But now, in grief
I see ripe fruit. Plump, round, rosy;
ready to wrinkle and bruise.

The shadows of people make shapes on her
skin.
Sorry reflections of wet eyelashes
flutter, blink,
then sag.
The old fingers curve, sway,
bend like grass
in the wind with every solemn wave
goodbye Lucy.

Mauve eyeshadow peppers
her round eyes, little crescent moons
like gray bowls. Dark lipstick,
like a whisper,
no longer a shout.
All the colors, all the products,
the same she always wore,
but applied with more prudence,
more skill that she ever bothered with.

In a little parade,
the short hairs of her brows follow each
other
from the farthest ends, the big ones
begging to kiss in the middle.
Soft flickers of freckles tiptoe

on her face, frozen in
time, bathing on her nose;
the thin, sloped nose,
the nostrils wide,
deep.

In the still air,
I trace the blue ski slope
The two dark caves
for fingers and Kleenex. *Lucy*,
did they clean the long tunnels before they
laid her down?
Where grass grows
and dew dwells, how can one
not wonder why
it is reckoned so repulsive to reach inside?

Whispers of a gray hairline poke
Weeds in the untamed lawn,
Sad eyes, so deep in missing
they follow the river of deep red hair
like berries
crushed under a thumb, watch it trickle
into the burgundy wood of the box that
cradles.

I look for her eyes beneath their lids,
desperately, hopelessly,
knowing they are wandering. *Lucy*
wandering in the soft river,
in the trees green
swaying, breathing
in the privacy of nature's dance.
I say *goodbye Lucy*,
And walk away

Seedy

In his hand he cups the basketball like an ample breast. “Seedy” is what we call the boy. Petite, fun-sized, cutie, little guy, whatever. He’s little, you get it. You didn’t like when he won, did you? News, news, news, I didn’t either.

We all threw dirt at him in the parking lot. We threw dirt at his mom and his dog too. You’ll be happy to hear he doesn’t have a cat, or at least he didn’t bring a cat to the game. We did get pizza though.

Pizza is so good. Pizza is so good after a long, sweaty, yucky game. Yuck! Anchovies! Anchovies are for whatever boys like Seedy and my grandpa in the nursing home.

In the nursing home there is a fish tank. Only one man can feed the fish. Every six hours they unlock him from a secret box in a dark room in the basement of the nursing home and they let him feed the fish. If he talks, speaks, screams, sings they feed him to a man-eating Range Rover. Whatever.

Whenever I grow up I will not drive a car. I will ride my bike everywhere, even if it is across the state. If the feds stop me I’ll stop the feds. I’ll stop Seedy and then I’ll stop the feds.

My mom has bigger breasts than anyone else’s mom. You can measure if you want, but I swear on my mom’s mom’s breasts that it’s true.

In my mouth I suck the basketball like it is an ample breast with a wide nipple. “Seedy” is what they call me.

Spirits of the Revolution

On the day of The Revolution you wake up sweating in your socks. You left the heater on, oh man! The Man will go down today, you say to the mirror, The Man will go down!

You wash your ears with lavender soap that's not tested on animals. Front and back, you wash, so every howl and holler will swoop to your eardrums with ease. Hurry, they're leaving. Wait up, you call. Your new black boots are in the bathroom, yes the ones with the yellow laces, no they're real leather. You hope no one will notice.

Where are the holes in your socks? Where are the holes in your jeans? Put some holes in those socks! You don't want them to know where you came from. Wash that mascara and lipgloss smirk off your face, you gotta live like a revolutionary if you're gonna go out today. Best not to straighten your hair, it's boring that way.

Did you make a poster? That's not clever enough. Cool picture though, have you always liked Anime? You should have written that on cardboard, you're wasting printer paper you know.

The Revolution has begun! You read a speech off of the notes on your iPhone and everybody says hell yeah, even though you said pretty much what the last person said. You are a Spirit of The Revolution. You are so radical, you might even let your friend give you a tattoo. Everyone wants to be friends with you.

Someone starts singing *This Land Is Your Land*, but let's face it, no one knows the lyrics after this land was made for you and me. You all sing it over and over, over and over until it means nothing.

You hope The Man can see you and everyone. Look what you're doing, you might be on TV. That would be so cool, wouldn't it? Remember to look angry in all the pictures. Show The Man you are so, so, so angry.

You breath deep and your heart beats fast, fast, fast you're going to say something revolutionary. You feel the words rumble in your belly down to your genitalia down, down, down to your toes. And maybe you do say it, or maybe you don't. Come on, does it really matter if you're the one that yells the loudest? You're probably going to take a long shower when you get home anyway.

Do you want to smoke with the rest of them after The Revolution? You don't know, probably, maybe, you guess so. This is the Spirit of The Revolution. This is why no one takes you all seriously.

The little ones start crying. Their sneakers are so muddy, were they with you all the whole time? Did they hear that thing you said earlier? You avoid eye contact, you are so much older. They don't understand you yet, you will never understand them again.

Somebody says a clever something and you slap your hands over your face. Why didn't you think of that? Everybody's reading poems about love and writing songs about peace and you are picking the gunk out of your toenails. You should be ashamed.

You need to change yourself right now. How dare you pop the blackheads on your chest while the kids with long hair and cool clothes are on their hands and knees begging for freedom? You are such a disappointment to this generation. You! Yes, you! You who says you're a Spirit of The Revolution!

The Party

The nicest girl has a face like the moon. She braids my hair into one long rope, long enough I could tuck it into my pants. She kisses me on both cheeks and tells me I am very beautiful. She tells me about her husband, and how much he reminds her of her father. I've heard it said that women fall in love with men like their fathers, but I'd never heard someone so proud for doing so.

Everybody's father thinks I'm really funny because I talk like a "sailor's daughter." I sip their beers when they're not looking and tell them embellished stories about my friends from school. They laugh and I wipe the sweat gathering on my forehead. I drift in and out of the room, hoping they'll laugh at me again.

The boy I am in love with is in the corner. When he hugs me, his arms droop at my waist like overcooked spaghetti. His chest feels flat and warm like sand, his shoulders protrude sensitively towards me. Pockets of air hold the space between us, regrettably so. It's awkward, I want to hold him tighter, but I'm not yet sure I'm ready to feel the shape of his body. I know if he were to hold me tighter, I would pop.

A little girl gallops toward me barefoot, her long orange dress trying to catch up with her from behind. I have never seen her before, but she collapses into my waist, squeezing my hips with her chubby hands. It is a gesture so pure and loving, I don't question it and entangle my long fingers into her light hair. Her heart bobs on my thigh like a little buoy. It makes my eyes fill with tears.

In the bathroom, I turn the lights off and cry for a very long time. I examine the moles on my left shoulder. They blink at me like little stars, dancing in unadorned constellations. One of them sends a sharp pain when I press it, I think I will get it checked out. I close my eyes and wiggle my fingers in the air. If for a moment it would stay still, I would hold it and drape it over my back like a blanket.