

HEARTS A FIRE

Hearts a fire.

She was dancing. She didn't know why, just moving to some rhythm that she didn't understand until everything changed. It happened so suddenly that it was hard to understand. To understand how just everything there was could change in an instant. Exploding inside were all these feelings, they wanted to come out and it was like they had a mind of their own but she just kept saying, "No. No. You must stay there, stay there, deep inside." It would be so much easier to understand if there was just a reason, something, anything, that could make the things she was feeling make sense. Whatever that was. It seemed to her like a finger painting gone

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all out of control, exploding on to the page, bright oranges and reds, deep reds too. Burning, burning everything.

The picture books were never like this.

They had all those pretty pictures, the books she used to read. Everything came with instructions and everything always worked out just fine, or you could take it back. And get another one. Very misleading the way that everyone always smiled, the way their clothes were always so neat and clean, the way they all looked like each other. The way they fit together. And they would take summer vacations to beautiful places where the water was always so blue , calm and very blue. They would ride on their summer boat with sunglasses, scarves and tans, smiling children, and they would all love each other very much. The way they fit together like pieces of a puzzle, like cracked egg shells put back together, like lock-ets made of broken hearts that you share with your lover, your best friend. The other half.

Fathers especially have trouble with their hearts.

Indigestion. From too much garlic and wine spilled over pasta that never ends. Clogged arteries get in the way, clogged hearts are even worse. He said it was from too much work, days that never ended and nights filled with responsibility. Only the reclining chair could help. But everyone thought he was absent because he could never hear a thing and would often hide behind the paper. Newstype, columns and columns of newstype. Words that had more meaning than children and their needs. Words that were more desperate than children wanting attention. Words that climbed the page, continuing for hours, offering solitude and respite from de-

mands that were too much. Glasses helped. They made the words bigger, putting them together, offering clarity. They helped him to see just exactly what he wanted to see and never offered too much. Only skewed views worked here. Only moments filled with laughter and pictures offering delight, only whimsy when he was not tired and never tears. They were just all too much those tears. They caused clogged hearts and made him sleepy. Everyone needs a nap.

The savage heart.

He stood before the mirror. Naked. There was nothing there but him and the mirror and the mirror just kept laughing. He looked up, perhaps there was something up there that he had missed, some silly joke that he would understand too, some stupid little bucket filled with water just waiting to spill on him the moment he moved, the moment he tripped the wire. But there was nothing and yet the mirror, it just kept laughing, haunting him. He looked below himself certain that his bare feet were funny, perhaps misshapen and still he saw nothing. All he could do was look harder, see his hair, it was nappy. All he could do was look harder, see his skin, it was dark. And then everything changed, and she was someone else. But the mirror was still laughing because now her skin was savage red, her hair was long and dark, her body bare once again. And memories came flooding back, of too much death and broken families of language she did not understand, of words that assaulted like fists pounding on bruised bodies. Fading in and out the words changed and the skin color lightened, it was dark again. Not deep and black but mixed all the colors of the world and most of all the mirror just kept laughing. Life in America. A dream, and then she woke up.

History books tell stories.

She thought that everything they said was true, and why not, it was in a book, it was written down, doesn't that make it true. History books tell stories, written by master storytellers. Haven't we heard that somewhere before? Master? Oh yes, that goes back many years but we don't have slavery any more. It's in our minds though, culturally, it's who we are, the air we breathe, the thoughts that never creep out into daylight but are still there. We are damaged. Thurgood Marshall said he got tired of trying to save the white man's soul. Are we lost? Do our cities burn with rage of our creation. Do our schools team with death of our teaching. Do our children believe the lies that their parents were taught by their parents. By the history books. By the arrogance of oppression and the absence of respect. There are not many truths in this life.

Stoke the fire.

She went outside to gather firewood, she wanted to make everything warmer inside. All the cold, the way it went right through your clothes into your bones. Deep into your bones so that it was hard to ever really be warm. The moon was standing there, up in the air, balancing everything, holding it all together. She wanted to cling tight to it, to stay there forever and just imagine the stars, listen to the quiet. Inside everything was so desperate. Everything was so mixed up. Everyone was so afraid. Angry too. Angry that so much had been stolen from them, angry that the history books had got it all wrong, frustrated because they didn't know how to fix it. She stoked the fire, she said stupid words, she didn't know what to do. The colors raged and raged blurring everything, messing everything up. Stoke the fire, it is all so very confus-

ing, the way the colors blend then separate, find each other then burst apart. Exploding.

Untamed heart.

Her feet crushed the crisp snow, making noise, squashing what was underneath, pushing all the fear away. She went inside. She looked in the mirror and saw herself beneath the layers, shed of all the lies. "I have to unlearn everything," she whispered into the mirror, touching her lips, outlining her eyes. "I have to see what's in front of me, as it is, only as it is to me." There were scarves all around the room, suddenly they were there, everywhere, beautiful too all their colors and the way you could see through them. And the fire raged. and the room got hot and all the lines gave way crashing the walls that had seemed so impossible before. She began to dance. Wild and ancient, untamed in every way. Rocking only to the rhythm inside, more different than she could ever have imagined.

So much happens when it's quiet outside.

A car drives by with a shotgun peaking out its open window. Whirring by so that the blast rang out in all the silence. And another child died. School books and wild afternoons, football games and hanging. It is school time and another child dies. While she was dancing. Ancient rhythms moan. Desperate streets await the paint as it peels off their buildings and bars fill the windows protecting everything, stopping nothing. It is all outside and it is all inside. And where the paint is slick and alarm systems hum, it is there too. No one is untouched. Ancient rhythms howl. Everything must change

because none if it fits together, no lockets or eggshells. Ancient rhythms cry.

Bad dreams.

She awoke to the heat of the fire. Everything had been so beautiful before she went to sleep and she thought that just this once she might make it through the night. Passing through her mind were ancient canyon walls, rust colored, like the earth. The water wove down through the canyons, rushing like it had somewhere to go, and the sky it went on forever. But then all those memories came back, all those days filled with standing on other peoples backs and hurting them. They haunted her. How could everything be so beautiful, the rhythm of the seas, the dark earth. How could it all be so beautiful when there was so much ugliness. It was not working. This trying to sleep through it all. This trying to ignore it. It was not working.