

**MY DARLING
FROM THE LIONS**

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MY DARLING FROM THE LIONS

RACHEL
LONG



TIN HOUSE / Portland, Oregon

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OPEN

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This morning he told me
I sleep with my mouth open
and my hands in my hair.

I say, *What, like screaming?*

He says, *No, like abandon.*

HOTEL ART, BARCELONA

We're eating roses on a rooftop. The Med beneath us.

They serve clouds here too, I say.

Light starter? Wink.

Are they fluffy or black?

The waiter doesn't answer.

Every table is white except ours.

We sit at a naked woodblock. Antique;

There's enough of an age gap here,

need they have added 200 years?

The razor clams arrive in straight lines.

What's the matter?

We discuss kids. Maybe it's the wine,

or because my belly is beginning to push

against the bones of my dress. You say,

I don't think I'll identify with a brown son.

Excuse me, I stand,

spill your sparkling water.

You only notice your steak.

Contorting myself three ways in the toilet mirror,
I decide I won't look like this forever.
I don't even look like this now.

Dessert is air from a porcelain pump.
What if he has your eyes? I dare,
after another glass.

Back in our borrowed bathroom, I throw up rose foam,
a blade of grass. Who says *he* isn't a daughter?

I join you on the balcony. You hold me from behind,
lean us over, count . . .
We're as many storeys up as our age gap.

Why do you always have to—
Shhh. You lift my dress. I shoulder-width my legs,
is love not this?—gripping a fence in the sky.

NIGHT VIGIL

I was a choir-girl. Real angel
—lightning-faced and giant for my age.

Mum let us stay up late
if we went with her to night vigil.

It started at midnight, a time too exciting to fathom.
How the minute and the hour stood to attention!

During Three Members' Prayer, my sister fell asleep
under a chair, so she never knew

how I sang. Or how I fell silent
when the evangelist with smiling eyes said in his pulpit voice,

Here, child.

Had she woken, I would have told her, *Sleep, sleep!*

so she'd never know Smiling Eyes
also meant teeth,

or that he had blown candles for hands,
with which he led me down an incensed corridor,

and I followed.

SANDWICHES

Tiff's got me against the school railings, doing my eyeliner. In double French, I'd whispered, *Your eyes. Will you make mine like that?*—slice through a room, a lie, a man—*Break time* her body on mine, stoosh then soft; sugar on the tongue of all she hasn't done yet, all she's heard she could do. Already, Tiff's a reckoning; bomb glitter on lids, oil spill on lips, sandwiches padding her bra. Yeah, the sandwiches. Thick, white, unbuttered. See, Tiff's clocked the boys have clocked the difference between a tissue and a tit, a sock and a tit, but not quite yet a tit and a slice of bread. O, girl, you have opened my eyes, how they weep!

THE CLEAN

white bowl of it.
The pile of it. Imagine
eating all the snow
you've ever wanted
in one sitting,
not having to pay for it.
The avocado of it.
Toast butter
cascading your fingers,
pink prosecco.
You'd be spaced-out,
clucking, grumpy,
sexless, you'd die
without this,
clutching your ribs
in the dark,
one street from home,
footsteps gathering—
I know a place
that is snow falling
from the Artex ceiling
into a room
you will never return to.
A promise
piling like cable knit.
4-ply snow-day snow.

I know a place where
the sad can't go,
where it'll never have
the right footwear.
Here, you can throw it all in.
Go on, baby, give it back
to whence it came.
Dispel three dinosaur dinners
like forgiveness,
like it never happened.
Bile is the bottom.
Ground zero.
There is no more after,
no more.
Girl, you can be new,
surrender it all
into one bowl. This,
your hollow.