

Stephanie Hawkins  
CRW3311  
12/6/15

## 21 Winters

“All we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given us.”  
-J. R. R. Tolkien

Lace

I ran my hands through the lace under my dress,  
Itchy and uncomfortable,  
Like sandpaper against honey hued skin.

Mama says it makes me look pretty,  
But I'd rather be ugly.  
She says we have to dress up for the Lord,  
But Jesus wore open-toed sandals.

She doesn't want to hear it anymore,  
If I get in the car she'll give me a Sprite.  
I get in the car.  
The leather seat burns through the lace straight to my skin.  
I try to bunch up my dress and make a safe spot to sit.

Daddy sleeps during the day,  
so Mama lets me ride shotgun.  
I ask her to turn up the radio and  
We sing until our throats are scratchy.

Mama loves to sing,  
She sings better than all the ladies in our choir.  
Dresses better too.  
Her purple dress radiates in a sea  
Of sad khaki skirts.

She never gets a solo though,  
I tell her she should.

I draw villains and heroes  
On all corners of the money envelopes,  
Leaving no room for white space.  
I rest my head on Mama's shoulder.

I love my Papa.  
He likes to tell long stories on Sundays.  
He likes to talk about the funny things I do.  
Like all the questions I ask him about God.  
I tell him after service that it's embarrassing,  
But I like it.

We get home and I rip my dress off.  
I put on my favorite pair of purple shorts,  
A T-shirt, and replace the lacy socks with fuzzy ones.

Daddy wakes up and grabs a beer.  
He stretches on the couch and turns on the football game.  
He says he likes my play clothes.  
I stretch out next to him.  
I do too.

## Duke Ellington Was Right

Scuffed suede glides across ebony wood,  
As brass sounds resonate in the air.  
Rock step, triple step, triple step, rock step.  
Beginners anchored themselves to this move,  
Regulars let the music do its work.

The best dances were with absolute strangers.

A dark-haired lead with suspenders too tight  
Would approach, hand extended.  
He would request a dance with you,  
You politely accept,  
Your hand meeting his.

Both of you make your way to the dance floor,  
Your arm resting on his shoulder,  
His hand below your shoulder blade.  
He smells like peaches with a hint of rot.  
The music starts and you keep it simple.

A couple of basics and a swing out.  
A sugar push in and out to a right-side pass.  
His transitions are smoother than honey oozing out of its jar,  
Swinging you out again and spanking his baby.  
You laugh.

There is a generous collection of sweat on his arm,  
But it doesn't bother you.  
He spins you and your satin skirt,  
Seamlessly grazes his corduroy pants.  
You lock eyes as though he is signaling the next move.

And just like that, the brass stops.  
Feet stop shuffling.  
Light clapping fills the air.  
You politely thank each other,  
Going your own ways, never to speak again.

You sit and pant harder than a dog on a run,  
Not for long as another lead approaches you.  
You kindly agree to another dance,  
Knowing it wouldn't compare to the former.  
You stare at the ebony floors, newly noting its hollowness.

## Cliff Jumping in the Pacific Because I'm an Idiot

They say falling feels weightless.  
But it is heavy.  
You feel the contents of your stomach moving inside of it.  
There is pressure in your head and ears.  
The air is full of quiet.

Your body sinks deep into the frigid water.  
You second guess your decision,  
Which is about as useful as deciding to diet,  
On a 2am Taco Bell run.  
Your ragged college sweatshirt pulls down on your body,  
Fighting to keep you under the surface.

The gray quarry matches the sky above,  
And the whitecaps bob up and down,  
Like a seesaw creaking back and forth.  
It carries you with it.  
You kick and move your arms harder than a dog paddling.  
They begin to scorch with pain.

Waves don't look this powerful from the safety of a cliff.  
They consume you like a child devouring a Happy Meal.  
You inhale water and fight to the surface.  
You find it difficult to breathe any longer.

You just wanted to do something reckless.  
Consciousness slips away.

9:03pm, In a Bar on Edwards Street

Musky wine goes down my throat harder than the  
girl's four inch heels scraping wood off the floor  
from across the bar.

The pulsing vibratos of Pitbull are equally matched  
with the woman's intoxicated shrills.

"Has a nice body, doesn't it?"

"Excuse me?"

The suitor in front of me swirls the wine in his glass,  
slow and smooth, as if he was its sole creator.

"The wine – it has a nice body, doesn't it?"

*Yeab, if you like drinking straight ammonia.*

I shout false praises at the wine,  
competing with high heels.  
Her voice rose in pitch with each sip I took,  
the agonizing sound pairing effortlessly  
with this excruciating first date.

Glancing past the rowdy scene,  
I notice vulgar posters on the walls,  
score boards from past trivia nights, and  
advertisements for different drafts of beer.

Then, I notice an old, chestnut grandfather clock,  
tucked away in the corner of a hidden wall.  
It's exquisite gold and wooden workmanship  
Misplaced in the remnants of this pit.

"Everything okay?"

"Yeah, I just remembered, I have somewhere to be."

## It's Not My Fault, I'm Happy

A chilling January breeze pierces my face, ears,  
And somehow my wave-like hair.  
If hair could freeze—can it?—the nest on mine  
Would crack off.

Approaching the library, I see people in white,  
Handing out hot chocolate and smiles.  
I gladly accept and as they hand me a cup,  
The warmth spreads from my hands to my arms to my head.  
I burrow in my coat and cling to the cocoa.

In my hands, I feel the warm—or rather scorching—Miami  
Sun on my bronze skin.  
I remember swimming at a former mermaid lagoon.  
Biking down Bayside Bay,  
Watching the blue and white abyss crash against itself.

I remember arguing about nothing,  
Over legions of pork and Cuban coffee.  
I remember those never stopping to be still,  
Pausing to kiss you on the cheek.  
Just to see how you're holding up.

I remember the crowds,  
And sitting in standstill traffic for hours.  
Like a hamster on a wheel,  
I was going nowhere fast.

So I came to a new cage.  
Where it is frosty,  
But also a luscious green canvas.  
Where I'll sometimes lay out,  
And stare at things I've only seen in cheap planetariums.

Chess

Wisps of silver grace the sides of your hair,  
Once so dark and full.  
“Check.”

You feign arrogance,  
The lines on your face wrinkling into a smile.  
Black liquid against the chestnut table wafts in the air,  
And coffee beans grinding echo from behind a mahogany counter.  
I take a sip of the caffeine, calculating what is next.

“Guess again.”  
I move my knight.  
Your face twists in playful annoyance.  
Rough and worn hands intertwine with my own,  
And your suede timepiece grazes my wrist.

Like a lightning strike from a clock tower,  
I am thrust back.  
To smooth skin and simpler outfits,  
Oh, but you were so handsome.

When we danced at the stroke of midnight.  
With your worn, spotted bowtie when we were married.  
When you were almost late for the birth of our first child.  
Even now, with years etched on your face.  
I was always a pawn in your hands.

You never were good with time.  
Always extraordinarily late.  
Sleeping in. A blown tire. Saving the world.  
Your ties always undone and hair disheveled.  
I always lied to get you there earlier.

So I bought you the timepiece.  
And now we are out of time.  
If only we had a DeLorean, I would steal some plutonium.  
To spend another lifetime with you.

We are at the end of our game.

---



