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## Pomegranate Seeds

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Pomegranate Seeds

Senior Project Submitted to  
The Division of Languages and Literature  
of Bard College

by  
Grace Kasemeier

Annandale-on-Hudson, New York

May 2021



To the many loves of my life, including but not restricted to, my family, friends, advisor and chocolate.

## Table of Contents

|                   |    |
|-------------------|----|
| Introduction..... | 1  |
| Part One          |    |
| Chapter 1.....    | 4  |
| Chapter 2.....    | 10 |
| Chapter 3.....    | 12 |
| Chapter 4.....    | 15 |
| Chapter 5.....    | 18 |
| Chapter 6.....    | 20 |
| Part Two          |    |
| Chapter 1.....    | 24 |
| Chapter 2.....    | 26 |
| Chapter 3.....    | 30 |
| Chapter 4.....    | 32 |
| Chapter 5.....    | 34 |
| Chapter 6.....    | 38 |



Window panes drip with water and soft lamplight. He and I walked in the darkness, the streetlights seeping through the fog around us, above us crystalline star filled skies. He always looked struck by something. It left me unbalanced. I wish he could've been different. I wish I could've loved him, just to have been in love. Out of all the men, the moments, he was the only one that feels like it could've been. I loved walking in the night with no purpose but company.

The last guy I'd been with would text me at two in the morning and I would run, be with him for less than an hour, and walk back to my dorm. I walked through the woods with the deer peering at me through the trees, dead silent. I wouldn't notice them until we were face to face. One time my bra was on my arm, soaked through from me trying to use it as a bathtub stopper. The night was warm but the water trickled from my bra down my arm to raise little hairs along its path. Shame and pain and obsession twisted with the water like cuffs along my arms. I got to my room and fell asleep instantly. I never fell asleep when he let me stay over.

This new man, who I only knew through playing our parts, walked me to my room after we'd been kissing. He didn't think about it, he just grabbed his coat and joined me in the November chill. I will always be in love with that moment.

The rest should have been easier.

## Part One

My grandmother's voice commands, "*You put it into words. I give you visuals.*"

## Chapter 1

The floor was cold. The tiles were smudged with silt. Bathrooms never really get clean. I told him I liked him. It was a lie. I liked him a lot. The bile in my throat twisted and swirled until I swallowed. "See I told you, you would like it." He spread himself. A glutton in all parts of life. The light was too bright, too white. He stood behind me in the mirror. The light showed all of him. I looked down. For all his gluttony, he couldn't make *that* bigger.

The taste of bile haunted me for too long.

wipe

### Mumma

I sit quietly in the back of the car, my back plastered to the seat. I close my eyes and try to melt into the scratchy grey cloth that held my lost M&M's. My mother wasn't overly cautious about what I stuck in my mouth. The M&M's would be a future me's treasure. The seatbelt scratched across my skin.

I used to pull at the seatbelt when I was even younger, squirming I would shout,

"I'm stuck! I'm stuuuckkkk!"

It took me a while to realize that was the point.

This time I only say,

"Next time you run away, Mumma. You have to take me with you."

We pull into El Pollo Loco. I eat a small burrito and my mom eats a chicken platter.

My dad waits at home. He was a vegetarian.

*Can't write anymore.*

*I love you.*

*I thank you.*

*My mother.*

*My Friend.*

*My Mentor.*

*My guidance.*

*My light.*

*My Beginning.*

*My Continuing.*  
*My end.*

I copy and paste my grandmother's words about her mother.

My beginning. My continuing. My end.

My.

We hold each other's *my's* closer than my dad can understand.

My mother.

"My daughter."

"Mi hija."

"Mami"

"Why does your Mom call you that? It sounds like she's calling you Mommy."

A shrug of my shoulders couldn't shake the weight.

We tip toe the line that would inverse our roles.

*I can't write anymore.*

My first word was "Agua." I made the g sound like a w, but I couldn't have been clearer. Not more than a couple months old, my mom enrolled me in swimming lessons.

I hadn't said "Agua" out loud yet.

Mamá, no necesitamos el lenguaje, ni las palabras, ni las bocas. Tú sabes.

Papi, no estoy seguro que entiendas uno de los lenguajes de mi corazón.



How do you forgive someone for not understanding you when you speak?

I wrapped my arms around his leg dragging him into place. The dark paneled wood shifted to painted forests, a mural on my parent's bedroom walls. My small hands cling too tightly as the leg carried me from room to room. *I'm too old to do this.* He gently shook me off with the reasoning of the weight of the world.

I rolled Daddy into Dad when the world's eyes insisted I was no longer a child. I don't stumble on "Dad" like I stumble on "Grandma."

#### La madre de mi máma

Her soft-wrinkled skin and white blonde hair softly framed the brutal words falling from her lips. Fire. The sun sparked against the surface of the water and her words flowed in the absence of my mother, "Boys? Anyone special?" Words I hadn't spoken to my mother wanted to crawl out. Words about his bottomless eyes and caramel skin. Words about his wit and my skin crawling with the secret of his laugh. I looked to my grandmother's face, "No, not really." I smiled to press the words to the rough of my mouth and sank back into the pool. The blue tiles my grandmother's hands had placed around the rim winked at me conspiratorially. My grandmother continued to talk; squeezing me with words like her sunsoaked tangelo juice. I let my hands rise and fall in the sun's reflection. My grandmother's touch, distant.

“Alrededor de tu piel ato y desato la mía” - Miguel Hernandez

My grandmother’s poetry about us knits into my skin,

*Your hand in my hand.*

My hand is completely encased by hers. Her fingers are wrapped so tightly around my own.

*Your trust in my soul*

Bitter words at the shift in our relationship. A vomit of unsaid words, “Of course I trusted you I was three!”

She’s sitting on my couch. Three industrial sized trash bags are splayed behind us, proof of her mounting stubbornness. An exclamatory refusal to take care of herself in the simplest way. She refuses the impossible luxury of a suitcase. She looks at me with eyes so bright, galaxies of hurt and vindication reflect there,

“You have to tell me when I do something wrong. I’m cruel so I know who really loves me.”  
I meet her pleading eyes with refusal. I’ve seen the talons clench and I don’t want to fight. Her words scratch and I numb myself in front of the t.v.

*Your spirit, and mine,  
Could dance, dance for ever,  
Without stopping once.*

The black and white photo of her from the newspaper sits between my fingers. Her bottle blonde hair flying behind her, a conqueror of herself. She’s sitting astride a horse who does exactly as she tells her.

*“This is my paradise.”*

“Alrededor de tu piel ato y desato la mía.”

I rub my fingers across my mom’s hand, kneading out the hauntings of past fractures. The three of us sit on the couch, frayed and uncomfortable. My mom groans when I stop to rest my fingers. My grandmother snores on my right. I pause the movie and she bolts up,

“No, don’t stop for me. I was listening.”

I let the movie play and my grandmother’s snores instantly resume. I go back to massaging my mom’s wrist.



My grandmother signs off her emails “Tu abuela Graciela”

Pero no sos mía.

No puedo usar palabras que no son para usted.

To my mom I call her, “Your mom,” does that save my mom if it breaks my grandmother?

I sit tensely on the couch and listen while she talks, an annual event. My mom walks by, “¡Mamá, en castellano por favor! Ella entiende.” My mom walks away and my muscles tense back up. My grandmother moves her legs and clearly shows me she’s not wearing underwear. I wonder who did that to her first.

*mi papá*

*Carlos Manuel Lenchantin  
Thinking of you on your B-Day  
with so much  
Love, Gratitude, Appreciation,  
Happiness to have known you,  
Joy to have had you in my life  
No sé por qué te escribo en inglés,  
sé que entenderás el lenguaje de mi corazón.  
Celebrándote en tu día,  
Gracias papá.*

“Call Papi when you get home,” my mom said.  
“Call your Dad,” she says more often.  
She worries that in English it sounds like my parents are divorced.  
In English, what has my dad done to deserve my mother’s “my”?

*sé que entenderás el lenguaje de mi corazón.*

I never really stopped speaking Spanish.

Does that cover up my guilt?

I kept the memory of words like “Agua” secret. I didn’t want to lose their sweetly-sick taste,

“Tengo hambre. Tengo sueño.” For years, fifteen minutes of soft words stretched into infinities as I dug my heels in.

My great-grandmother and my mother were outside of a grocery store. My mother was young. A woman passed them with a white sense of recognition,

“Are you speaking French? It’s lovely.”

My ancestors wrought pain with language *que baila en los dedos de los pies*.

I have the face of Spanish Queens.

## Chapter 2

I run my saliva soaked fingers through the lake in my mind's eye.  
I enter the water nude,

Baptism through memory.

My friend and I are sitting on the porch in the sticky night air. The transfer from summer to fall is always less than crisp. The lights flicker; simultaneously too bright and not bright enough. We go to the meeting on my computer.

I see some of my past men. He pulls his hand through his hair and I see the bald spot he got from trying to blow dry his hair with gel in it. The other him moves a little to the left and I see his painting of a tree that watched me when I almost came.

The meeting ends and I go to my room, the fairy lights glow in the darkness.

I sit on my bed and read the words of great poets. I read my grandmother's words. I read men's words with rhythm and women's bodies as the sheets,

“wipe, wipe, wipe/ wipe the sperm,/ get it off the sheets,/ off her” -Miguel Algarín

The bile in my throat stays tucked in between my vocal chords.

Wipe. The sheet and I are no different. Wipe.

You don't even have the courtesy to look down at us. Wipe. Laughter. Wipe.

“At least your eye can't get pregnant.”

wipe. wipe. wipe.

I jumped into his blue eyes to breathe.

I took a shattering breath only to run into more lips and hands and hips.

I spun so fast;

I pulled myself and ran. Ran into nothing. Ran into a him with searching eyes and hands that would never find what they were looking for.

My grandmother's disjointed texts pervade my thoughts on sexuality.

“Wandering. Wandering. I'm wandering, so lost. You're a woman.”

Grandma, what's going on?

“Jajajaja, just a little joke. Congratulations on losing your virginity!”

?

*Memories are.*

Put soup on the stove, low heat.

*They keep me alive.*

Let simmer.

*Make sense to my life.*

Be careful to not let it burn.

My mother's recipe for soup from my grandmother's childhood. Both of them make it and both soups taste nothing alike. My mother's soup changes every winter. She fills up our whole fridge and freezer with it because portion size is something that has always evaded her. I've loved a different version of that soup every year. Really, at its core, it's the same: some sort of broth, some sort of vegetables, and often potatoes.

I'm worried he loves my soup.

Sometimes, I feel like my best friend's ex-partners. She looks at them and does everything she can to embalm them in affection. They look at her in awe, dumbstruck by the comparison to their past lovers. Savoring the seconds, she laddles up their gratitude as her penance.

She loves my soup.

### Chapter 3

I read Gioconda Belli today.

“Tu cuerpo es el paraíso perdido  
del que nunca jamás ningún Dios  
podrá expulsarme.”

I look at the current him and force barbed trap door words out of my mouth. I'd rather let my mouth, my finger, trace the line of his ear and whisper,

“Déjame que coseche los frutos de agua  
que sudan en tus poros”

He answers the words I say out loud,

“I know you know you're special, but I need you to know *I* think you're special.”

His actions don't make the same promise.

The familiar taste of those I can't save clouds my overwhelmed palette.

I slam metal doors against my best friend as she repeats his words to my gated heart.

Her actions come in magnified waves.

Metal rusts with exposure.

My taste sharpens around her promises,

“I love you.”

Why do all men taste the same the next day?

I realized it wasn't them,  
 I tasted in their mouths  
 But me,  
 Caught there,  
 A little singed  
 A little stale.  
*I taste that way.*

I saw a past *him* today. I see them constantly, my university a shifting map of my sexual history.

He told me once that he's very good at storytelling [I love stories more than I love men]. I don't think he knows how to stop. For a brief second, I looked in his always-wide blank eyes.

He might not have a soul.

He hurts so much, I tucked the thought away.  
 The cheap devil horns he bought for his Halloween costume, sparkled in the moonlight.

The universe rarely gives me vague hints.

Being soulless doesn't stop men from pouring themselves into me.

Waiting for him to text me back, I watched him walk up the stairs of my building arm and arm with another girl. Laughing, he locked eyes with me and smiled.

wipe.

I thank my flesh for bearing the weight and forgive my fingers for loving stories.

*My mother.*  
*My Friend.*  
*My Mentor.*  
*My guidance.*  
*My light.*  
*My Beginning.*  
*My Continuing.*  
*My end.*

The weight bears on my grandmother, my mother, and me. It bears on us and bleeds up our maternal line.

Something seems to snap.  
 Snap along the family tree.  
 Snap along the vine.  
 The women snap, and snap and snap  
 from the weight of men along their spines.

My mom called me after Thanksgiving and we talked about the Macy's Day Parade. Usually, when I'm home, we eat pie and ice cream for breakfast while we watch it. Then we do our vegetarian style Thanksgiving dinner at lunch. The rest of the day is Christmas movies and reheating the lunch food for snacks.

It was just my mom and dad alone this Thanksgiving. My mom shattered a plate.

My mom's mom was alone in her house two hours away.

Snap.

I always wanted to tell him, "No toques eso." I wanted to show him the pearly words I had stored in my teeth because *he* would understand.

My life lacked men, not stories. My mom still tells me,  
 "You need to go somewhere where they speak Spanish and find a lover. Then you'll learn it so fast."

I lost myself in a him for the first time. I bled into him and out of him. He took my blood to his lips and drank. I wiped away the stray drops on his chin -

Wipe

He took and shattered and stretched truths. I gave and I wondered if I loved it because it made him seem like a man.

He bent my feelings to fit his shape.

## Chapter 4

*Too young to know,  
Too old to bend.*

Boys and men blend into circles. My grandmother jokes, “You just started to enjoy the pleasures of sex and BOOM, pandemic!”

I just started. I’m always starting.

My friend’s words, “You have to stop with the Mexican-Catholics with Daddy-issues and the Jewish boys with Mommy-issues.”

Winding and winding; I tread my circular path.

Too young to know, too old to bend.

Paths made by words forged into realities by fingers.

He wasn’t what I expected.

I told him I have to occupy space this time.

He didn’t understand.

He thought he had to occupy none.

Another warm body,

My individuality brushed away by his lips,

An initiation?

He was an old-man and a boy stuck in the body of a twenty year-old; his friends said so. He tied himself to the space between being too young for sex and too old to want it. His body did not agree with that decision.

He was fourteen with the logic of a sixty year old philosopher. I encouraged him to write. He looked at the blank page with the defeat of centuries, “I can’t write something that hasn’t already been written.”

He let the page stay white.

I looked at a different him’s words and parcelled them out one by one to show my intelligence. Rolling them through my tongue and into his hand, he looked with empty eyes. I told him of women, of blood, of mystery. His eyes glazed and he saw beauty, porcelain, a moment before fracture. He lifted me up with the weight of the world. I was too busy looking at words to notice my feet on the pedestal. A real life Galatea, I jumped. He shattered. Too scared to drown, I

covered his bare head in words; I washed away the bitter taste of his kisses. A boy entangled in his mother, I was a sinking rope to manhood. He still carries her on his back, ancient.

Ancient men trapped behind such young eyes.

My mother asks my father if he's hungry, "I don't know."

I asked the newest him the same. Bitter bile at his response.

"Feed me." his mouth and hands pleaded.

I bit his lip to feel. I stretched him out and laid him flat.

A meal for no one.

*Too young to know,*

*Too old to bend.*

My grandfather is faceless in my memory.

He is a sunlit tangelo orchard, holding a cat sized me.

He is my mother's imagined howl when the can hit her foot.

He is the way one of her toes permanently overlaps the other.

He is a smile in a stained photo.

He is boiling anger and righteousness from my mother's words.

He is familiar in the words-strung together by my grandmother,

*Too young to know,*

*Too old to bend.*

I walk on wet sand. The outlines of my grandmother's feet pressed in the ground, roll out before me. I walk in my grandmother's footprints made deep by my mother.

My grandmother's written words sound, "“*Y ¿qué pasa con los muchachitos?*” “*Tienes alguno en especial?*” “*¿Cuál te gusta más?*”” Memories of the women asking her the same questions.

*¿Cuál me gusta más?*

Me gusto a mi misma.

She continues,

*“I guess I was pretty lucky; I had great loving mother figures in my life.”*

My mother can't say the same without a caveat. My mother is the beat, the skip, between love. Her mother, the beat, between my mother and her abuela.

My mother looked at me and in all her imperfections, closed the gap.

*“Mamá le vas a tener que traducir a papá.”*

Not anymore. She bends in the sand and pours salt water to melt away the path. I look down at the too-slowly fading lines and try to stay the course.

My mother's blossoming sexuality was a thornbush thrust against my grandmother; A weapon to tear her flesh into aged lines. Mine does not pose the same threat.

I tattooed my flesh with pomegranates to reclaim it after his touch. My blood drawn to him like my grandmother's to my grandfather's and my mother's to my father's.

A translated scene;

My great grandmother holding my grandmother's white veiled head to her chest, “Don't worry, you can change him.”

*“Graciela, the adventurous 22 year old starts a daring adventure. She gets married to Jorge, a 30 year old young man who thought himself ancient.”*

Their God in my grandmother's vows, in her poetry, in her skin. I want to tear down His house so you will finally pray at my feet and *see*.

His rosary beads dripped through his fingers, an oath to his friends, to other men. His fingers dipped in me, an oath to nothing.

I screamed and shook in my core.

Por un momento, todo.

## Chapter 5

When will I not feel like his eyes erase my edges? I looked at them and they looked past me. Just an hour too long around him and I was swimming in my bleeding personality.

A year earlier he gazed from the sofa, attaching his self-loathing to my body. Drunken ecstasy marked by the chance of victory. I laughed with the weight of pain and righteousness. *Those eyes* blurred away from each other. The music wasn't good but the beat was just enough to let the liquor move to my arms, hips, and feet. Just enough to pound against my heart beat. I got one person to join my dance, he lit and quickly drifted away.

The eyes coming from the sofa stayed and I met them half-lidded. Closing mine, I twisted and laughed. Finally, some testament to him feeling something. Proof of some past momentary truth. There could be nothing more concrete than eyes and brittle words. I danced for me and he watched. Nothing would come so close to tasting like victory.

“Do you trust me?”  
Un-uttered and withheld,

*yes?*

My best friend made a playlist of songs for me. I heard the words of *Pool* by Samia for the first time two weeks ago.

“I'm afraid I need men.”  
“Need me then.”

The hard shelled leaves shattered underneath my shoe.

Snap.

I have bared my soft fleshy soul not just to many *hims* but to so many hers.

I'll change. I'll be better. Just don't leave me.

Their hands slip from mine as their eyes fill with targeted anger and betrayal. They plummet off the cliff.

I mourn the death of too many alive people. My best-friend stubbornly refuses to be next.

*Your hand in my hand.*

*Your trust in my soul.*

*Your spirit, and mine,*

*Could dance, dance for ever,*

*Without stopping once.*

Chapter 6

Addressed to Jorge, my grandfather, from my grandmother:



*Wishing we would have had more time together  
to learn and grow.*

*Wishing I would have known how to love you better.*

My flesh winds and unwinds around the many hims. I always want “more time.”

This time he’ll save himself for me.

I learn and grow and peel my flesh away from my chest,

“Look.”

Pants fall.

Shirts slide.

I tenderly scrape my nails across my skin,

“See.”

Blood flows from me to you to me.

I only ask them to do as I do. I ask so little.

“Look.”

“See.”

Blood.

They turn from my dripping hands and walk away. They leave me,

*“Wishing I would have known how to love them better.”*

My mother’s voice in my head, “It’s sad really. I can’t love your dad the way he wants to be loved.”

My parents don't sleep in the same room. When my mom finally asked my dad if he wanted to sleep in his own room [There was no space for her in there with him] my dad didn't hesitate. Now, my mom and I, when I'm home, can hear him snoring. His snores fill the whole house. No matter where I am I can hear him. In the morning, we tell him how he rumbled, how we could hear him over the t.v., how even on a different floor of the house we couldn't escape them. He looks at us blankly, "I don't snore."

I walked up the sandy stairs barefoot, in nothing but a shirt that fell to my knees. It was Sunday. The sun filled up the corners of my parent's bedroom. Their bed sat on a raised platform that made you look at it. I shuffled my feet across the grainy floors and crawled into that self-centered bed. I put myself next to my dad and curled up onto his shoulder. We had this dry erase board that was pixelated. There were parts that didn't work because we'd rubbed them all the way down. My dad picked it up and stories fell from his mouth and hands. Childhood lakes. His long dead sister. Bike rides. Baseball. My mom slowly woke up and the three of us made our way through that giant house to the kitchen; there, we made breakfast right on top of each other.

## Part Two

Peel my flesh.

Wipe past stains.

But I am all stains and flesh and pomegranate seeds,

Look at me.

## Chapter 1

I was talking to this woman the other day, who's almost my friend-we're not super close. She was telling me about this really gross guy. The kind of guy who thinks they're doing something but it's just an uncomfortable non-pleasurable boundary crossing something.

She said, "But if I don't have sex with him I just know I'm going to be forced to "take a vow of chastity" for such a long time."

Every fiber of my being understands this sentiment. I dig my teeth in that feeling and throw myself into new sexual relationships

.

I was lying in bed with a past him, curly haired, fairy lights, inside joke, boy who was there--- and said,

"Yeah, I don't always hook up with people I'm attracted to."

He replied with this cock-sure half open smile, "Oh... that's so sad."

I'm sure I raised my eyebrows at him. What part of that exchange made him think I was attracted to him?

I whispered to the last him like I was making a covenant, "You're not *just convenient*, you know."

He loved being performative in bed and life. I got caught up in the performance.

It wasn't enough.

My friend and I were walking in the field while the sun shot through the trees, on one of those bizarre beautiful February days. Her small frame next to me, the sun stunningly silhouetted her magician librarian aesthetic, she said, "I can't wait for you to be with a normal guy. I mean not *normal*..."

"I know what you mean."

She said falling in love was like walking into a patch of sunlight when she always thought it would be like falling off a cliff.

Parts of me feel broken re-telling old stories of him's who were never going to be my *love story*.

So many other women, students, friends of friends, are presented as these mirrors of expressed femininity. I want to think they have partners because they have lower standards but maybe they're just better at being what people want in a woman's body.

Even worse, maybe they just found a man they really like.

She had the audacity to ask me if I'd ever been happy with a man.

She said it so simply, like she had this key all along, like she *knew*.

## Chapter 2

Vessel imagery always gives me chills, Samia's lyrics respond to my mom's words on our performances for men,

"I guess I'm just a vessel still. I just need to be filled."

Lies men take as fundamental truths.

I thought he was a better one this time, but only because I erased the moments of unease, when he opted to not occupy space.

He picked absence over presence.

My mom's early outlook on men can't help but affect how I am around them,  
 "I'll just change my shape."

I want to say I like me too much to like *him* this little and stay but he was the one who left.  
 Making boundaries was choosing not to chase him.

I asked my grandmother about her relationship to men,  
 "I didn't have a clue as to what boys were."  
 What boys are? Are they?

My mother knew something my grandmother didn't. When men take, we're told to give.

My mother wanted to rewrite history with me. She said, fill yourself up and then give. I try to tell my friends whenever I get the chance.

When I lost my virginity my parents took me out to brunch to celebrate. We were in Beverly Hills. It was so early, it was just us and the runners. We were in our pajamas. My mom was in her "indoor clothes."

I had sat in the back seat of the car on the way up, making me feel timeless. The sound in the backseat is only the run off of the conversation in the front so I never had to participate. I never had to fully give up concentrating on the mountains, the cemetery, the skyscraper tall billboard.

Beverly Hills is always closer to the ocean than I think it is and the cloud cover that day was proof. Sunny L.A. is a tourist's dream of my city but springtime near the pacific ocean at 11 a.m. has different ideas.

The brunch was delicious. Exactly the type of food you expect from a brunch place in Beverly Hills, including the wonderfully stereotypical avocado toast. I had a bagel and lox, even though I would call myself a vegetarian if someone had asked me. My mom doesn't like to spend my dad's money on meat.

The waitress didn't give my mom the time of day, her wrinkles completely erased her personhood, but my dad's silver locks worked like a charm.

“Oh what would you like, *sir*?”

Old white men always seem like they're *industry people*, they usually are.

We were almost finished with brunch when my mom remembered what we were celebrating, “To you being a woman.” My dad made sheepish eye contact with me over his glass.

I cheers'ed with my beautifully crafted latte.

My best friend is one of the few people who understands the constant consuming desire for sex. When we talk with our peers they look at us like we're deranged.

My other friend went up to me afterwards one time, "I really hate the word horny."

I love the word horny I just haven't figured out yet how to separate it from lonely.

My mother's words on men, "A lot of training that they're supposed to want, want, want, want you."

#### WANT ME THEN

I saw every man who's ever seen me topless in the course of two days. Some of them I haven't seen in years. It's moments like that when I think, "Maybe a small college wasn't the best idea."

But I'm so close to being done and I'll never see any of them ever again. These men who marked such drastically different moments of my life will completely disappear. What they do won't matter anymore.

I started to write a poem at the beginning of last week, when the first spots of spring started happening, and all that desire I thought I could ignore came knocking down my door,

How do I say I want you *more*?  
 More than scratched backs  
 More than you inside me---  
 I want me inside you--  
 I want lines completely blurred---

I didn't finish. The desire for utter destruction in an act of physical intimacy makes me feel like I'm not a feminist.

My dearest friend and I were sitting in the sun the other morning with our iced coffees that we've been getting for the past three years. We get brunch every saturday because work and partners are for weekdays. She was just cuddled up on her chair, crunched over because of period pain. My fair complexion was slowly getting roasted in the sun. We stayed like that for hours, just slightly uncomfortable but too in love to move. I said I wanted someone to *take* me and just slam me against the wall, she told me about how her partner picked her up in their buff arms and held her in the air above them for a second...

“What were we talking about again?”

A little out of it she continued, “All I want is a good job and kinky sex.”

Sophomore year of college we came up for names for the imaginary ideal partners we invented for each other. Her future wife was The Goatherdess and my future husband was Strawberry Blonde Miracle Man. Sometimes I think she might be my soulmate in the most intimate and platonic way possible.

I was talking to a past him, a couple months ago, the one who wore devil horns for Halloween, about attraction. We had had the same conversation over and over again. I staunchly believe you shouldn't fuck your friends. He disagrees. I said that if I'm sexually attracted to someone then we're never really friends because I always want something from them.

He said, “But that means I couldn't have any attractive female friends.”

My eyes must have inflated to twice their normal size, I didn't say, “You want to fuck every woman whose attractive?”

I want to fuck every man I'm attracted to but my god, every man whose attractive?

I don't think I got my point across.

We bumped into each other yesterday and he didn't recognize me. I looked him in the eyes and called him out. He said, “At least it's only been this once. It's never happened before!” I think I gave him a sarcastic double thumbs up but honestly I might have just blacked out.

I think he was referring to a different him? But I'm not sure.

I told my mom about our interaction and she said, “Can you blame him you've changed so much?”

I calmed down after that. It's not like he recognized me when we were seeing each other.

### Chapter 3

Peel me back, hold me close, bite into my seeds, peel back my white flesh, peel me back, peel

Fingertips dripping with pomegranate juice, I'm tired of convincing them to let me stain their flesh.

In my first years of college, I lost my virginity to a sex addict and then immediately started to date a virgin. He was a much more navigable language, familiar. We were lying in bed, clothed from the waist down, my head was nestled on his bony shoulder. I told him about my high school boyfriend, about being Galatea, about pomegranates and snow and rose colored glasses. Some part of him must have known, he said "Are you worried I'm going to do that to you?" After turning me down months later, I never seemed to be able to escape seeing him.

It was one of many rehearsals, his feet dangled in line with my eyes, one draped over the other. Pink socks with mermaids glared at me over the top of brown laced shoes. I smiled brightly back. I scrubbed the floor at his feet and the needle sharp prick of shame tickled every surface of my skin. The anger curdled in the back of my throat. He looked down at me, unmoved. If I could've slashed his pity filled eyes with my nails I would've. I stood up and towered over him. The lowered position of his eyes didn't change how they saw me. The church pew held his overly decadent limbs uncharacteristically gracefully.

*Flashes of light and dark on his cheek. The bus thrums underneath us. His bouncing knee bobbing in and out of sight. His thumb sliding over my hand. His grin plunged into darkness.*

*"You're Catholic right?"*

*"No." I bit back without adding, "Is that a problem?"*

He said something polite. I smiled and got another napkin to clean up someone else's spilt coffee.

He wasn't physically attractive. I was surprised by the weight of my shame around finding him so *shiny*.

It wasn't like that with the first guy. He was all smooth words and weaponized beauty. It was addictive to believe I'd never find another person seductive.

"It's nice that we're so attracted to each other." The last him said to me, perfectly content. We dramatically and endlessly talked about each other's allure. But his vanity was only a failed attempt at self-love. He disappeared without a word and quickly collected himself a partner in my absence.

It was disturbingly hard to convince myself that the reason he hadn't contacted me was because he didn't want to.

Sex rolls through my skin like an oath to myself.

I take my communion from sensuality.

Need rolls into want rolls into pleasure and I rolled in these men, understanding myself as sacred and then utterly losing myself.

I always feel betrayed when they don't *see*.

I always feel seen as a woman but never as Woman. I always see them as Man.

They rarely see themselves that way.

My friends words on her partner,

"He seemed so young."

Men just do.

Men don't have lines between boyhood and manhood.

## Chapter 4

My parents met at a party in the 80's in L.A. My dad worked in *the industry*. My mom saw him and instantly knew, "I want that one." He told her he couldn't date a smoker. My mom quit the next day.

She always tells me when I was conceived they loved each other.

"I really was gaga for your dad." A breath filled with, "but"

"I never had that feeling of surrender, letting go, and that..well... this is good for me."

The other day my dad asked me where the matches are, in his own house.

"Maybe the small cupboard in the dining room?"

"I found some there but they weren't open."

"Open them then?"

Mumma taught me how to be and my dad sees no difference.

My dad called me the other day to tell me his work had been in the newspaper. The stained walls of my hotel swam in and out of my jet-lagged vision. Spilled coffee pooled along the provided Bible onto my vibrator. I quickly hung up the phone.

I didn't expect to instantly love my nephew. My brother's baby blue eyes, that mimic our father's, nestled in those baby rolls utterly convinced me.

It's harder loving my brother.

I want to spit and fume unavoidable truths, but instead I say *light* things. Conversation rolls out of my brother in a self-centered attempt to kill the silent air. I listen to it wash against my distance and let my hands reach for his son. He gently rejects my questioning touch.

"Let's practice your Spanish, that's your *tía*."

*Tu tía.*

A possessive smile graces my lips at the sound of *tía*. Sister, feels much more dangerous.

My dad stood up with pride filled eyes to congratulate his only son on his wedding day. He told the venomous crowd an npr human interest story about the connection between a father and his daughter. I watched him try to give this broken gift to my brother's non-receptive gaze and excused myself to a bathroom. My mother had excused herself hours ago.

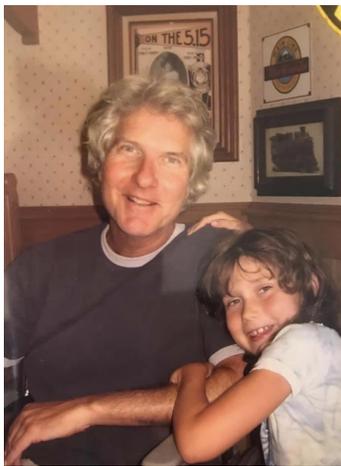
My mom fell in love with my dad because of the artist in him, the work-aholic, the built in family. I forget that even though my brother wasn't in my life that doesn't mean he wasn't in theirs.

My dad's art has lost something recently. My mother's mother in her Latin, Aries spirit said of a portrait of me, "Her eyes are a little dead, no?" I couldn't have disagreed more vehemently. His portraits of my mother deaden but he never deadens me.

He is small, quiet. He's six feet tall but whenever he's next to my mother he looks so much shorter. He's gotten shorter and older at a rate I hadn't expected from the man I used to wrestle and nestle with on Sunday mornings.

Sundays used to be my favorite day of the week.

My dad and I used to spend so much time together when I was kid. We swam in the pool for hours and hours until the sun got low enough to give us a chill. My mom would bring us popsicles and we'd suck on them in the shallow end. I always wanted to play mermaids. "I'm Ariel so *you* can be Triton." My dad would grimace, "But Triton's so mean."



## Chapter 5

My grandfather moved here from Argentina with my grandmother. He bussed tables in Mexican restaurants until he learned enough to start his own.

Sitting on the leather seats, I only remember the place after my grandmother sold it. I remember it with the distorted brightly colored murals on the walls. The parrot with a claw coming out of its chest. My mom says when her parents owned it, it was darker, grimy. I don't remember it. My mom orders for me and speaks to the guy at the cash register in Spanish, he speaks back in English and deftly maneuvers between the two,

“¿Ella entiende?”

“Un poquito”

We sit in the leather booth and try to avoid making eye contact with the news on the t.v.'s. Thankfully, only one is playing the news, the rest are playing a soccer game. The guy at the cash register serves us our food and I push “Gracias” out of my lips, worried my accent shows how I betrayed my mother's origins.

The door with the logo my dad designed swings shut. My mom and I leave the restaurant, ending one of our many mother-daughter outings.

My grandmother always thought she was better than the people who worked at her restaurant, more educated. She told me she was raised to live in the U.S. She scoffed when I mentioned that if she wanted to, she could write some stuff down about her childhood in Spanish.

*Sé que entenderás el lenguaje de mi corazón*

“I'm really much better at writing in English.”

She perpetually distances herself from the “immigrant story.” Her accent is the only thing that betrays her.

*Sé que entenderás el lenguaje de mi corazón*

My mother, my grandmother and I float in my grandmother's self made pool. Incandescently deep blue tiles wink in the sunlight. The squat palm tree sways. The pool cover my uncle gave her has been thoroughly and haphazardly removed. It lays folded over close by on the hot cement. My mother's skin lined, like my grandmother's, from years of tanning glistens from the sunscreen/tanning oil. The two of them slowly spin on hot pink pool toys and pool noodles. I dive back under the water and stop hearing my grandmother switch back and forth between Spanish and English, she doesn't notice when she switches. I come up for breath.



Discussing her image my grandmother states,

“People would call me “beautiful” and it would make me mad because I would look in the mirror and see THIS... but pretty? Pretty was kind of cute. I never knew I was pretty.”

Pretty has always felt powerless.

She continued,

“My mother wanted to keep me safe so as a joke, everytime I would leave the house, my mother would say “Cuidado con los muchachitos.” You don't think anything of it.”

“Joke” tastes like a sour drop candy.

My friend whispers resentfully, “You’re literally *a goddess*.”

I dressed up for me this time. I sparkled and dipped my eyelids in gold eyeshadow.

Twisted lips and the last words a bit nasally, “You’re an *actual goddess*.”

I smile graciously and feel myself get warm on the inside. I don’t know if it’s *because* of her resentment or in spite of it.

My friends were telling me today that it surprises them when people hate the way they look because I’m so confident. My other friend encouragingly said, “and it’s not even hard to be!”

I make it look easy but I have to constantly hold myself together. Loving myself is my only option.

In high school, I was really athletic. I did synchronized swimming. It gave me broad shoulders and an athletic build. I ate more food then, than any other time in my life.

I cried on the way back from a meet and told my mom, “it feels like you think that I’m worth less because I’m big.” Her eyes and mouth shockingly said, “Well, you are big.” When I stopped swimming I didn’t stop eating. We went to the doctor and they encouraged me to exercise. I lost 20 lbs when I went to college and they never tell me to exercise now. I haven’t done consistent exercise since I was an athlete and 20 lbs heavier. My mother always beams and prattles on about my “figure.” I rarely have three meals a day.

I thought a man hadn’t seen me without makeup in four years, but I was wrong. I thought I had constructed this beautiful lie and judged them for believing it but I forgot the mornings after. I forgot how they still say “you’re beautiful” the next day and how I never really let it touch me. The first man who said that to me, we were kissing, I replied,

“Oh? Cause you’re such an impartial judge.”

When one of them didn't say it, it felt like a lie.

I keep constructing myself. Beauty is my favorite double sided knife.

## Chapter 6

When I was eight or nine my mom held me while I cried about having no passion. It feels so entitled to say so. I had a gorgeous princess style bed with a frilly white canopy that I'd wanted since I was three, but instead I slept on a futon in front of the staircase that went to the master bedroom. I cried in the dark and my mom held me so tight. I cried and cried. "You're only eight, you know. You'll find something." I chuckled and fell asleep to nightmares. I still can't escape.

My roommate sophomore year of college told me she heard me whimpering in my bed at night, "please...please don't hurt me." She said it sounded like I was being raped. I have the faintest recollection of it.

I designed the tattoo on my left rib to alter my landscape.  
Pomegranates are the food of the dead.

My dreams are pretty regularly haunting but the other night was spectacularly so. I dreamt I was having a threesome with a girl who was dying and a man who was a virgin. She died silently and her face turned up towards me. She was me, just two years younger than I am now. The man and I couldn't stop having sex.

Writing "man" is a struggle when my fingers desperately want to put "boy."

I survived them.

My mom finishes telling me about her past men. She looks toward a future,

"Now, I would like somebody who likes me 'cause *I* like *me* more."

I can't help but let my breath finally go.

I wasn't allowed to eat pomegranates as a kid. When I was around eleven or twelve, we had just moved into a new house and there was a stocky gnarled pomegranate tree out front. My mom would only let me eat one on the condition that I ate it in the bathroom without any clothes on so I wouldn't stain anything. It was such a project that I rarely wanted to do it, but one time I was desperate. My mom cut me the pomegranate and sectioned me off. I sat in the empty tub. Slowly, I peeled the white casing from the seeds and ate them each individually. Slightly uncomfortable but excited nonetheless, I stained my fingers, lips and chest deep red in the stark white room.

I designed the tattoo on my left rib to alter my landscape.  
Pomegranates are the food of the dead.