

TO THE TEETH #3

written by Mairead Case | April 16, 2019



Today I'm writing about waiting, because lately I've been waiting a lot. It's like wearing a certain kind of hat. In my notebook a few weeks ago, I wrote HURRY UP, PLEASE IT'S TIME. I wasn't asking anyone in particular, and anyway my grandma used to say you can stand anything for three days. She stood a lot for a lot longer. She was pregnant for at least six years of her life (that I know of), and after that, for separate reasons, she had a hard time using one of her arms. We chuckle alike, and now that I'm alive twenty years after she died, that sound seems wild. I hear it inside and out.

The point is not what I'm waiting for, so don't expect me to tell you, Internet. It's not a secret, it's more like: I don't like writing that only holds out for a reveal. The poems that matter most to me aren't codes that need cracking, but lights and earth and freaky beauty. We already know the Wizard of Oz is just a guy. We're all just guys. So this isn't a secret code, but maybe it's a spell.

My mother, who is that grandmother's daughter, taught me about waiting by teaching me about the bruises on my elbows and knees. The deeper the colors, she said—the purpler—the deeper the healing. Like that, she showed me how to tell different pains apart. Often it takes bad bruises a day or two to appear, especially if you forgot to ice and elevate (or when icing and elevating is impossible). Bad bruises, which means deep bruises, are blue and purple, and sometimes, a burgundy like crushed velvet. They speckle. I think they are pretty, but not in a way I want to wear or make. They are pretty like how science is amazing—pretty like, let me tell you: my mother taught me how bodies make our own suns to heal. When bruises are blue and purple and burgundy, they heal to yellow and green, and finally brown. Sometimes that takes a long time, but it is a generally trustworthy process.

One of the things I do while I'm waiting is text a friend who recently transitioned. I call him his new name and he calls me Doctor, which is who we are—who we made ourselves into, sometimes—even when we feel weird about it. Change can be terrible. Caterpillars turn into soup in those cocoons! It looks like Dinty Moore. Sometimes at my jobs, I wish I never said I was a doctor, because sometimes, saying I am a doctor is like saying I wear gold-plated moon shoes. Like: here I am on earth, wearing my money and not able to move. Of course, that's not true, but I understand why people think it might be. Something I learn as I wait is that it never really helps to argue with people about who you are. You already are it. It's hard for everyone. Early

in the mornings I text my friend pictures of the highway outside my window. It sounds like the ocean, but of course you can't tell that from a picture.

Another thing I do while waiting is listen to Rod Stewart's "Young Turks." I didn't plan it, but it started happening after I lost a hard drive last winter, and eventually it happened every day. So I didn't argue. "Time is on your side," Stewart sings in his suit. "Don't let them push you down. Don't let them run you around." It doesn't seem militaristic, but it doesn't seem casual either. I think it might be a spell too. The video is a lot of goofy-looking white people doing the duck walk and making snaps. It is the only Rod Stewart song I remember hearing.

Also while waiting, I eat a lot of eggs on cheesy tortilla with pickles. I sit on the kitchen floor to eat them. I stretch, which is how I know that if you put a finger in the middle of your chest, your heart will puff out even when you thought it couldn't do that any more than it already was. In their book *The Hundreds*, which for me is first and foremost the name of an area in Chicago, Lauren Berlant and Kathleen Stewart write, "I am trying so very hard to want the world I have in front of me to want. My heart is beating so fast I swear I could beat the shit out of something quite grand with it." It's like the summer all the blue lights went up in my old neighborhood. The color was everywhere, and it made everything urgent. We followed it.

One night on the floor this winter with eggs I read Sarah McCarry's *Glossolalia no. 17*, in which artists, writers, scientists, guides, and a ship's crew go to the Arctic Circle and get drunk on the color of the glaciers: *a fathomless siren color luminous with sunlight, silt, meltwater thousands of years old, how do you name a color like that, how do you even say what it is*. At night they put chips of it in their whiskey, a different kind of drunk, and it isn't stealing anything, it's more like my grandma's chuckle: inside my head, and out of both it and time. The zine is six pages, and I cried when I finished it.

While I wait for everything and nothing in particular, I think a lot about James Baldwin's essay in Richard Avedon's *Nothing Personal*. My copy has flowers pressed into it, because the person who gave it to me did karaoke while whipping himself with flowers, like Morrissey. In that essay in our book with flowers in it, Baldwin writes, "If your lover lives in Hong Kong and cannot get to Chicago, it will be necessary for you to go to Hong Kong. Perhaps you will spend your life there, and never see Chicago again.

"And you will, I assure you, as long as space and time divide you from anyone you love, discover a great deal about shipping routes, air lanes, earthquake, famine, disease, and war. And you will always know what time it is in Hong Kong, for you love someone who lives there. And love will simply have no choice to go into battle with space and time and, furthermore, to win." My favorite part—which means the part I read aloud most to myself, on the floor in the kitchen—is how these words could let someone be both lover and beloved, because while we wait, we still have to be. Otherwise, there's no point: "you love someone who lives there." You can love someone else, and (or) you can love a future you, even when the current one is occasionally a hot mess.

Baldwin isn't here to clarify, but I would guess he meant—or, more accurately, I want him to mean—that if winning comes after battle, winning means most simply that you are not in battle anymore. This is a hope that is important, not because it is foolish but because it is necessary. Winning could last for a day or for the rest of your life. It could be two, or one, or seventeen or yellow. Maybe it just means you get to enjoy your sandwich. But I want it to be a lot, forever, because I believe in home and that looking at something long enough—that sitting with a changing bruise, that walking with a corny song—is always for the good. Nina Simone told Peter Rodis that freedom is like being in love. Freedom is no fear. And so we wait.