

Kate Weinberg

Negatives

I.

My mother on the kitchen floor, surrounded by
potato peelings; my mother

gnashing on the tiles, the tiles' faces
mottled with little Os

like how ghosts show up in pictures--bobbing
blinding orbs, electric
floating breast-shaped things; my mother's face

placid-puckered in the nothing way potato
is mute to knife--

splitting its single
passionless continent into many

bland islands, in the logical way
things un-sentient don't know knives

from lips
kissing dirt from their dimples,
clefts. A bowl, full—skinned

potatoes on the island
in the kitchen

shining cornea bright. She peels, washes them
naked, slides on her back in their skins—up-ended

pig, blankly ecstatic, ghost-orb
mouth whooping slightly, peek-a-boo

teeth. Potatoes glister florescent
beneath lamp shade nests

woven for focus, so the light shrinks back
its lake of bland sprawl, pointing

like a long hot finger, like god's
long hot finger, beneath itself

and mother and I imagine ourselves
angels beneath god's

pointed palmy heat
when the radiators stop slurring,

spurting beneath all their bulby
metallic-smelling paint. angels

as the cold freezes the water tap
shut and night slides in, jaunty
in its frozen, inky

gait and we: orbs
we: picture-stilled ghosts,

round and fleshed and
moony as those far-away crops

rustling up from middle earth
waiting to be plucked.

II.

grandma is biblically
huge her mouth takes food
sloppy, whale-like, the dead things she swallows
wrestling in their dead way
with none of jonah's verve,
her lipped roof
fine-boned and fish scale-shiny,
exhaustively sour. She: mammoth
static island, colored
hair that shimmies like gelatin mold

when we feed her
things drop from her lips
sea-brine swaying. She: grunting, sugary
head quaking, hands
splitting the mess of her mouth-fall
plankton small, blue scalp
peaking gently, low tide
tremors beneath coif
crowning dessertishly.

III.

Oh brother won't you

send word from that hale, flanked beast upon which you coarsen and wrestle and maim
your slippery goddesses. they say you throw them overboard to watch their faces as they under-wave, noses
protruding, buoying like a slim point

like a pencil or needle or other trite conclusions of form through the green blackness through clapping fists, more
violent at night. they say your soul, if ever it was, has been suited and confined and buried and I say Impossible: it
was your will to be burned,

there would have been flames a heat at skins a bristling a shiver
in reverse. it's hard to trust people

hard to trust when they've fixed their mouths on delusion, defamation, and frankly,

I'm with you oh holy stumbler. I hear the boards you walk are only half un-rotted and I admit I praise I knee-slap
swear if only you'd raise your head and speak it, tangle your slattern tongue around the corridors of solid answering
I could make you clean again without the hollow faux-lemony smell of public-restroom sanitation. i'll say remember
thanksgivings '92-'99, how the snow fell through the country club's huge glass faces and everyone stopped pulling
the bones out of their salmon to stare, silent

in that echoey room, naked walled and chair-less, the blooming cold suspended: a robe of ghosts hovering shoulder-
high. Your eyes

will undark—brother, i see the retreat—and i'll pull the curtains away and say

See, No One is watching, No One will be here till Mouthy Dark calls off Bashful Light. but for now there's tea,
appetizer-sized portions of quail on toothpicks, gooseberry nectar.

i'll grab your fist and unfurl your red fingers and we'll do an indian dance involving sage and owl-bone crowns and
i'll say now sit

sit and tell me what dresses we should wear

when they burn us.

Birds in Bags Over Galilee

do not return home; stay in Israel
Jerusalem Yeh-roo-sha-lie-eem Holy Land
where lips go purple after nights guzzling
mountain grapes and not the cheap shit
your father first got head-
swimming drunk on—no—
liquid less monumental, more expensive
than that small history

you are told of at length, wriggling
bodily to escape what you suspect
you will become, your genetic
google-map. Shoulder-blades
sharpen inscriptions along the sway
backs of chairs announcing your departure
from flesh, from the chatty
script of bloodline demanding
sideburns on a woman, arms the kind of hairy

school-bus taunts were made for, a patch
above the crack that flows
Samson-lush when wetted
by sea or shower or
sex in that sweltering hostel in London—
same boy who finally (third time's the charm)
disengaged the stubborn sheath of skin
so long eluded you, made you dry-

heave in a spinny room first time
you tampon-ed, twelve chittering girls out-of-doors
cheering your womanhood as new blood
spatted in clots from the place L. adjudged early on
the “special hole.” Later than them
in every biologically-meaningful way.
Not meant for tits, meant for
tissue in training bras, a uterine lining
hellbent on shedding itself near

naked every month, once it caught
the endocrine drift. At Yad Vashem,
look at images of prisoners
growth-stunted, their angled shriek of bones
foreign and disorienting as hieroglyphs. Know this:
there are some symbols
not meant for ferreting out. They will leave you
cold of tongue, chattering of teeth
if you try. You will try. You will not win
back any warmth. You will toss in bed
waiting your turn.

Six of you shed
bathing-suits for pure plain skin, hook
fingers in fingers and Star-Of-David your bodies
in a dancing swoop through thick salt, piss-
warm water of the Mediterranean. One old man
slats himself between tall waves, eyeing twelve moony
breasts in varying states of wax and wane. Sometimes
he disappears behind a curtain of water but
is always there when it parts again to deliver him

his celestial due. Creepers
migrate at night. As do woodcocks,
thrushes, thrashers, nuthatches,
bobolinks, grebes, murrees,
loons. Start at sunset and fly
clear past the lip of the cool-ass moon,
hung there

silent and patient as a door-knob
waiting to be turned, swung
loose at its hinges, entered
full-fleshed and famished for buffet. But soon

you will learn: this, too, is not quite
freedom. There are strings at one end
and they will tug them tight till they grab you
soft at the neck, tag your knobby ankle

so no one wonders
if you do not return
what you are. You are
This. You come from.
Stay
Stay
Stay here in this hand
and it will feed you.