

Olivia Grayson

## The Excruciating Promise Of Exchange

There is no letter to open, no heartrending  
Script or post missive invoking niceties  
Any fool might understand.

There is no poignant notelet or bastard  
Type followed by instructions:

Make a sharp left, turn there; it's just past  
The Shell station where you'll see a girl  
Hyperventilating under a haystack.

~

There are no magic charts or bookmarks,  
No royal alphabets or promised lands,

Only footnoters injecting "explanations;"  
Pencil abusers stealing from you gradually,

Then suddenly, like Columbian gun powder,  
Like Chinese snow, like the friend of a friend's

Friend from out of town who hangs around  
Too long.

## He Had Fallen In Love

They met in front of Bernini's Ecstasy of  
Saint Theresa; an angel in bodily form.

"Her name's Sally."

"Like Sally Tomato?"

I drew a breath so hard it made me moan.

I envisioned her prone, wildly struggling,  
Hands bound behind her back, while one

Of Keyser Soze's henchmen leisurely  
Eliminated her.

Once, I read his fey, agonizing ballads  
With all the fervor I could muster, once,

We sang Fred Rodger's songs:

"It's you I like, every part of you, your  
Skin, your eyes, your feelings..."

Recently, I met someone I really liked,  
But was so anxious, I got plastered and

Told him to go to The Automobile Club  
Of America (confusing the acronyms),

Although I detest those 12 step programs  
Where you are meant to believe:

Your personality is a character flaw.

## DRIVE, HE SAID

See that wildly gesticulating man  
flailing in the rearview?

He's been jerking & shaking like  
that for blocks;

You hit the gas hard, but here's  
the light. He's getting closer,  
he's right next to you.

His face has so many shapes.

You roll down your window—  
roll-roll-roll. It's punishing,

like hand-churning fat globules  
into a single chunk of butter.

He wails, "Can't you leave  
the people alone!? You've backed  
up right against my bumper!"

"That's impossible," you say, because if I  
had, it would mean I was going in reverse!"

Which you were, & usually are, but there's  
no way you're going to admit that. No way.  
Instead, you insist he collided with *your* bumper,

and this is just after that kid at Union Square  
accused you of touching his \_\_\_\_ ; you can't say it,

but it starts with a D, as in the 37th president,  
the only one to ever resign office; the muscles

in his face pulsating, you swearing he was  
touching you with his 37th precedent.  
His face had so many shapes.

## Packing For A Trip To The Rocky Coastline

Suicidal ideations? Check.

Primary support system? Must inquire—  
(what was that wretched woman's phone  
Number)?

DNR note? Got it.

Confirmation letter proving I'm high on  
The continuum of dementia praecox?

It's in there. Somewhere. I think. Maybe not.  
Can't remember. What did I just say?

Sounds shaped expending deliberate incongruity?  
Right. Check.

Jaw-breakers? (Damn these molars)!

Floss? The enchanting dental assistant at Dr. Levy's  
Likes Translucent Frost, but I like Tom's Naturally

Waxed; it's from Maine. How I love Maine! The  
Honey bee is the official state insect, and it's

The only state in the United States that has one  
Syllable.

Well, let's get on with it! The Supershuttle will  
Be here any minute. Now.

## PATTY

The heiress empathized with her captors,  
That's why she participated in her sexy  
Outfit,

Believing that what was happening was  
A new and better identity of traumatic  
Bonding,

That what she was doing was good, and  
Important, because when a victim takes  
On the same

Beliefs as their aggressor, they no longer  
Become a danger, merely a body of similar  
Bodies living

In deep and loving harmony in the best  
Interest of reason.

But when she tried to get others to see,  
It disappeared,

And people called her vicious, sentencing  
Her to seven years

In prison. President Carter commuted her  
Sentence—

That's when it's done out of grace, not right.

Later, she acted in movies like Juror No. 8  
In *Serial Mom*,

And Traci Lords' mother in *Cry Baby*. I was

Never what people like you wanted me to be.