

Midnight Telephone Conversation

Hey mama,

Can we talk?

She was sitting in my room last night,

Cigarette dripping gold where it dangled between her teeth.

Yes mama,

It was cruel -- how she snipped the split ends off her hair;

How her lipstick was smudged and she smelled like ash

But her spectacles were dainty

And the flowers on her jeans were fragile

(I embroidered them myself,

With the boldest red and indigo I could find

Like they were torn out of the arteries and veins

Of the great Spanish kings themselves,

Washed in the blood of Atahualpa

Whose black hair engulfed the mountain like a rug when he fell).

Yes mama,
I know,
A miracle, it was,
That when she ground out her cigarette butts
The ash spelled out some truth,
And that there is no romance in nicotine
Or her scritchety-scratchety cough,
Yet somehow, I could not help but believe what she said.
No, she certainly cannot be real --
Not any more than a window can exist
As it cracks and melts beneath torches and flames,
But oh! how it burned,
The city,
Paris at midnight,
When the rats came out to the masquerade
And we danced with them in the alleyways,
“Danse, mes amis, danse!”
Until we could smell the sun rising
And the chef from that café swatted at us with his big metal cooking tray,
Stabbing his finger towards the “no loitering” sign in explanation.

We sprinted off humming a song from *The Nutcracker*,
Her laugh sharper than the pointed toes of my favorite Russian ballerina
As she cracked the clouds in half and made it rain silk on the streets.
“Snow day!” the children cried,
And she tipped her wide brimmed hat and flipped open a magazine
(*Vogue*, spring edition).
I sewed a dress out of the silks, just the orange ones,
And tried to ignore the way the dusty roses sloshed across her cheeks,
A whole garden of them, dripping wet paint.

No, mama,
I didn't do my laundry this week, I couldn't
Because her head might've slipped off my shoulder when I stood up,
It could have cracked open on the plaster wall
And that would have swallowed up all the red giants and white dwarves
Which we had pinned so meticulously to the sky the night before-
I would have had to clean up the stardust and star-ooze
Using my Barbie Doll's pink plastic vacuum,
Although maybe I would have just splashed the room
With pigment and named it justice.

Yes mama,

That is a funny word,

But you should have heard me screaming

When the lightning set the roof on fire.

She screamed back

And suddenly not even the rain in all its cruel and soggy shadows,

Could have corroded the gentrified murals,

Locked in as they were by the lightning and a shout.

Next thing you know my hair is woven with satin

And she sits there cackling,

Same as the conquistadors did when they tore out Atahualpa's throat,

Her voice perfectly cruel in its continuity.

Then, from nothing,

There's a slice of bright green paint on her cheek,

And that's how I know she's not lying.

(Art does not lie).

Yes mama,

I'm happy.

Mhm.

Yes, mama.

No, mama.

Love you too.

Good night.

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