Lisa Eve Cheby

Lisa Eve Cheby’s writing appears in various journals and anthologies, including The Rumpus, Ghost Town, Role/Reboot, Tidal Basin Review, A cappella Zoo, Drawn to Marvel, and Coiled Serpent. She was a 2017 SAFTA Writer in Residence. Her chapbook Love Lessons from Buffy the Vampire Slayer from Dancing Girl Press was featured in The Wardrobe’s Best Dressed Series. Cheby holds an MFA from Antioch and an MLIS from SJSU. See more at http://lisacheby.wordpress.com.
WHY I LIED WHEN MY SISTER ASKED ME WHAT WAS WRONG

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i
Have you ever felt the pleasure of deseeding a pomegranate picked from a friend’s tree? The cold water on the skin, the hard casing of each seed in its embryonic sac? Then the sweet wetness of each seed breaking in the mouth, the mouth that cannot speak the self for fear of angering the sister?

For Thanksgiving I told you I was going to London. You replied, “That’s nice if you can afford it.”

I liked the photo of you in your golf-plaid skirt with your new set of clubs.

On Veteran’s Day, like every year, I shared the photo of Apu, a refugee in Army Green. You commented: “I too wondered.”

ii
Have you ever delighted in the ripe firmness of the skin of a persimmon, bit into this fall-spiced fruit picked from a tree shading a poetry reading behind a Hollywood home?

That night, women read about our common struggle to speak the self.

I spoke this half-truth of what was wrong: “I caught a cold in London.”
It’s the first time I heard your voice
since early November,
or you mine.

What took us so long to hear?

Did you hear when I did not confess
that a glass of wine is the only relief from this grief,
from all I am too polite (afraid) to ask (admit)?

So we talked about Christmas trees —
mine a live noble fir and yours synthetic
with pre-strung lights that dance to music

sterile as your remodeled kitchen
where once I suffered

for making coffee
I would prefer to drink
with a book

in silence

I sneak out to the backyard,
shovel a hole between the shed and white fence,
bury my guilt and bleeding heart
with the coffee grinds.

iii
Do you remember the joy of baking medve labs:
pressing the buttery cocoa dough into tins
and onto our tongues? “It’s not the same
without you and mom”

we agree.
I get out the tins, form the dough into frogs (your favorite) and butterflies, crescents and roosters (mom's favorite), poinsettias (my favorite) and leaves.

iv
I did not visit this Christmas.

This is not what is wrong.

I want to say what is wrong
what divides us
is as stark as
stripes and stars against red and blue—
who is the stripe and who is the star,
both white and waving to a sky we believe
our parents share with us
—bound by threads we yearn to unravel:

v
Your colleagues mistook me for you when I laughed.

I cannot not hear you and mom when I laugh.

Remember how our classmates were afraid to eat “the bear’s footprints”? Next year Mom called them cocoa prints, a new class favorite. You, Mom, and I laughed.
Apu's nephew, Uncle V, old enough to be his brother, 
drove me around Canberra the day we met and discovered 
a shared family trait: bad humor. 
We laughed 

at how across decades and continents, a stranger 
can walk into your home and be family. You confess 
you felt this when Uncle V's grandson visited you. 
He laughed 

with your son, who twenty years ago, a toddler, recited a litany 
of the makes and models of the cars on U.S.19. We marveled 
how much like his father, who was never a father, he was.  
You tell me how little he's changed, 
laugh nervously, 

and still I can't explain  

what I really want to know is  

will we ever have 
an honest 

will I ever break 

this silence 

my silence?  

I held your hand as you drove skyward 
over the gulf-spanning bridge
so I could read poems to the new generation
of Novo Collegians. You sold
my books as I signed and talked with poets, friends.

Driving home, you cried because you could not
name the root-anxiety. Was it the height
of the bridge, the whoosh
of cars passing, the weightlessness
of venturing outside the five mile zone of comfort?

Or was it the realization of the power you have,
pushing the gas through the engine,
that could propel the mass containing us
through the web of wire and metal
like a magnet drawn into the steel-blue water below?

Have you ever felt the joy of blackness
so cold your lungs gasp
as you reach the sunshine through only
the will of your own force?

viii
Choose one to complete each statement.

Choose as many as apply.
You may use each more than once.

1. How I hope you can read this A. with love
2. How can I let you read this B. without condescension
3. If I let you, will you read this C. with hope
4. How can I write this D. with compassion
5. I hope I can write this E. without judgment