

movie date

viola davis is looking at us through the screen
and she's laid up with this white man
and mine leans over and tells me
that could be us one day
but i'm tired of hearing him breathe
so i shake up the ice in my coke
and go to the bathroom just to sit
in a stall and think about all the things
i'd rather be doing on a saturday night
and when i come back thank god
finally viola's got snot pouring out her nose
while she tells some trifling heifer off
her voice is stabbing at us through the screen
spit flying out her mouth
she says to that white lady
she can keep that no-good
dirtylyingcheating
sonofabitch white man
and i hear someone yell
mmhm I know that's right!
viola finds herself a nice black boyfriend
credits roll
everybody claps

And on the way home I don't tell him how I hate hearing him mouth-breathe. I nod when he says the movie just didn't do it for him. I let him kiss me. I don't tell him that he's still greasy from the popcorn. I let him pick me up the next day. I ask him to keep picking me up. I hug his pearl-wearing mother and smell her perfume. I let him pay the tab. I swipe his cards. I get a neck pillow in first class. I let him cheat, but just once. I have doors opened for me, seats pulled out for me. I lay in bed with him like the cower-down, master-pleasing bitch I am. I touch generational wealth. I wear a fat ring. I let him spit on me. I marry him and have his little beige babies and name them Sarah and Johnny and Emily and Timmy. I cry strong-black-woman tears. Everybody claps. It's just one of those things.

eclipse

my boyfriend is a reptile breeder
and today he wants to show me
what it looks like when a gecko is gravid

he takes two of them out of a glass terrarium
both with sagging translucent bellies
skin stretched thin enough to show
two bulging eggs on the underside
of each body and i'm scared
that if i squeeze too hard they'll pop
right there in my hands
the eggs splitting open inside them
eggshells puncturing organs
and babies drowning
in their mother's blood
before they ever take a step
and when i ask him if this could happen
he wiggles them around
and pokes at their stomachs
to show me that it won't

i like the black-eyed one
that he tells me is called an eclipse
and i can't tell where her pupils and irises meet
so it looks like she is seeing everything

she rests her swollen body on my hand
because its too hard for her to do much else
and he tells me that its not normal
for her to hold on to the eggs for this long
its possible that they could be bound to her
which means that she won't pass them
her and the eggs might die just like that
and i wonder what it must be like
to be so full of life that it hurts

he puts the geckos back in their tank

and tells me that he can't afford
to lose the eclipse or her hatchlings
when he has a line of buyers
ready to invest a few hundred
to make them into breeders of their own

he says that it could be almost anything that's causing problems for her:
a calcium deficiency, stress, a rejection of her nesting area

but i think she knows what she is doing
by choosing to keep those eggs inside her
because she has seen everything
with those eyes and she feels the weight
of two perfect lives within her
teeming with boundless potential
and she knows that it is hard to give that up
to a world that is so undeserving

feed me grapes, show me you love me

love comes to me
in a bowl of fruit
cut up by my mother
pineapple and oranges
sticking up her good
granite counters
souring her fingers
halved strawberries
that could just have
easily been left whole
a mango stripped
and then sliced
carefully around
a stubborn core
and she leaves this
for a worn and blanketed me
that has not left the bed
all day but to piss
and turn on the fan
me who can't even
say thank you between
snotty sobs that come
and go at the thought
of getting out of that bed
to do something as small
as turning off that fan

love comes to me
in a pomegranate
beautifully deflowered
by a man who wants nothing
but to feed me each seed
to kiss the purple juice
that bleeds out of the corner
of my frowning mouth
to wash my stained fingers
for me while i droop

my arms and hang
my hands under
a running sink when
it is too much for me
to soap and dry myself

love comes to me
in a paper bag full
of gleaming lemons
unpacked by grandma's
drooping brown arms
and then squeezed
into a plastic pitcher
poured into a plastic cup
zinging and sour enough
to put holes in my mouth
and it hurts in a good way
i suckle on a lemon peel
spit out seeds on dead grass
i drink and my grandma
kisses my brown forehead
because she knows i need
the little sting in my cup
to be strong enough
to give me that feeling
to give me a feeling

the b-word

they don't want to say it
unless they mean to spit it

this skin is a cuss word
white folks whisper
when they say black
like it might offend us
ask if we prefer to be called
something else
something softer

they'd rather say it the long way
seven syllables somehow
simpler and slicker
and sweeter
than just the one
african-american
easier than black
no not a regular american
not one without an introduction
to remind us of the forgotten land
they took us from
wish they could send us back to
than to put us all
on the same grayscale spectrum

their grandfathers say negro
or sometimes nigger
but when their grandchildren
listen to the radio
and there are no b-words around
they soften it
ending with their mouth open
and lips parted
preparing to scream

they stomach it better

when they call us people of color
even though they're only talking about one
but they throw us into the melting pot
because it is better to be vague
and keep all the coloreds in one place
like how their grandfathers remember
and their great-great grandfathers remember

or they can tell us that they don't see color
doesn't matter if we're white, brown, purple, orange
but it doesn't feel right to put the b-word on the list
it doesn't roll off the tongue

what about a color makes someone flinch?
what is it that makes someone hush?

tell me im black
like how you say i miss you
like how you say congratulations
say it to me like you're proud of me
say it like its warm

say it even though it stings
let it crack against the back
of the teeth
and whip the tongue
to give it one good lashing
that our great-great-great grandfathers
never forgot

blue-black

OPEN OPEN OPEN

it tell us and we stand there
with his breath billowing blue
a plume of air spread thin around us
given color only by the gleaming neon.

his nose is red
away from the flickering blue light
but my hands are still black
in my pockets
still black
in his hands
maybe blue-black
but barely.

the blue is in his veins
bouncing back
reflecting off of his own pale skin
while my blood absorbs the abyss
and i must leave the glow
of the moon for him to soak in.

beyond the light of this corner store
i will disappear
black flesh fading fast
like blue breaths into the atmosphere.

recliner

i am laid back, heated
only by the sun that slinks through
the blinds.

there is no time
to collect dust.

i am the center
of your living room,
the staple-piece of too many
family rooms.

both old and young round
their bony backs into mine and breathe
their deep sighs into my open ears.

my shoulder is pinned
by your head but still
gather around me to gossip, please
weigh my cushions down with spilled
drink, tears, drool.

even when my cushions are torn
and my stuffing exposed
and my pillows become flat
i will cradle you
as best i can.

fold your day's burdens
into my plush frame
never stop
to think to yourself,
how heavy am i?

turn on the tv
or bring to me a quiet book
and i will hold your weight
in this sun-soaked room.