

*Not Asphodel*

In the living room  
there was a bright white door.  
I knew if I went through I  
would be dead.  
I was alone—  
I mean there were others,  
strangers, but we only smiled  
at one another and milled about,  
looking intently at the objects in the room  
but careful not to touch anything.  
This made it a kind of party.  
As for me, there were bookshelves.  
I recognized the titles of my books.  
I did not need to see my name  
to know they were mine.  
These books, with all their pretty names,  
already existed, for instance, in this room.  
I turned and a woman stood there, ruining.  
She was distraught.  
Oh, I wanted to help her.  
Don't worry, I said, it'll be okay.  
She was wringing her hands.  
Her hands were raw and red.  
She kept looking at the door behind me.  
I don't know what I'm doing here, she said.  
Or maybe she didn't move her mouth at all  
and I heard her voice in my head.  
I wondered faintly—  
like an elk moving  
in the woods  
in the distance  
if I was already dead  
the way my books were already written.  
And the woman said,  
Oh, are you a writer?  
And I thought I must be in hell.  
And I thought of William Carlos Williams,  
his lovely poem about death and his wife,  
*Asphodel, That Greeny Flower*,  
and how he wrote  
that he was cheered  
“that there were flowers also  
in hell.” I looked around the room  
and there were no flowers.  
I desperately wanted to read more of it,

wanted to reach out and have his book  
in my hands,  
but it wasn't there,  
it was at home,  
in my lacquered green shelves.  
The prettiest books  
are flowers, meadows, snow.  
I went towards the door  
and felt the cold brass  
in my hand.  
And the room was so white.  
The sun white as paper.  
You mustn't go, the woman cried.  
Don't be afraid, I thought,  
and hoped she could hear me.

*Elysian Fields*

No snow  
nor heavy storm  
nor ever rain  
Homer said

He did not mention  
the naked man  
on the neutral ground  
shitting

In groves you'll live  
and lie on mossy beds  
Homer said  
but he forgot the glitter

Last night  
I heard a string of shots  
and a terrible scream  
and this morning I saw

A ribbon of blood  
with no beginning  
and no end  
as if it fell from the sky

What if I didn't want  
honey-sweet fruit  
and perfect weather  
just the cops to come on time

But they don't come  
to Elysian Fields  
where I live  
as if an invisible river

stopped them

*Garden of Old Men*

Christine, don't be afraid.  
Harold Bloom will make you a cup of tea.  
He's waiting patiently for his wife Jeanne.  
Then he and you will sit in the lamp's circle  
and he will recite again page 83 of *The Beauty of the Husband*  
and you will rewrite your senior essay  
and he will read it this time  
instead of giving you an A from fondness  
and knowing things without reading.  
He'll also add you to the canon  
with a nice addendum  
apologizing for not doing it  
earlier, on earth,  
and all of your books will be linen  
hardcovers, pink, lime, baby blue,  
untouched, lovely, soft,  
mewling like babies in their nice dresses.  
The rest of your book collection  
will be there via media mail, this time gratis.  
And Sandy McClatchy will visit for dinner  
and it'll be just like that time  
he introduced you to famous poet after poet  
and you held a glass of champagne in each hand  
and between your teeth.  
Franz Wright will come too, with all the other old white men  
you loved personally,  
because the truth is,  
Louise Glück and Cynthia Zarin have other places to go,  
in their black Alexander McQueen,  
they will not be joining us,  
they did not love you like these old white men,  
like a sprightly daughter,  
when all they wanted to do  
was place a crown of laurels  
on your black hair.  
The house will be Harold's house,  
your favorite kind of house,  
old and filled with beautiful things,  
an intellectual's house,  
and outside it will be Tivoli Garden,  
the one in Ljubljana,  
where the tiny orange and blue and red and yellow song birds  
have been trained by centuries of grandfathers  
to come eat walnuts out of your hand.  
Night will be easy.

In this house you will never die.  
The old white men will make sure of it.  
Feverishly, eyes twinkling,  
they'll sit by candlelight  
stitching your name  
like a scar.  
A thousand times they'll write  
your name then write it  
again, each time they will  
what you will  
what you want  
want what you will.

*Littlejohn*

In the future when the peggy martins and jasmine have arched over  
feet sliding on moss & the white camellias and the red camellias don't look so haunting  
all alone standing there like ghosts

In the future the little stones the weeds the butterflies the fuzzy black caterpillars  
will all be organized neatly  
nicely watercolored with tiny script below them

Littlejohn, this I can promise you

Perhaps if you are tired of waiting you might become a little tuft of grass  
or a glass of water at night

but I'm coming for you Littlejohn—so are all the beautiful women riding bicycles

and the handsome young men with their sleeves rolled up  
and a piercing through their nose like a bull

we will stop organizing our records and going to protests and complaining about rent  
and come get you Littlejohn

*Marie*

I have lunch with Marie,  
I love eating with women,  
and walking with them through the city,  
looking into houses  
or stopping to take pictures of a hawk.  
The pictures will go nowhere  
nor will we delete them,  
but it is better than  
forgetting the hawk absolutely.  
Today Marie is sad  
though her dark hair falls in perfect waves.  
She is pale,  
she is beyond blushing,  
her voice is a fountain, a whole girl's choir  
gurgling, it's many voices at once,  
Italian and Chinese  
and Ethiopian and French,  
and it tumbles over the cool white table cloth,  
we don't have our salads  
and steak tartare yet  
to distract us, to comfort us,  
and she is alone  
in wanting to be loved  
and not being loved  
how she wants,  
and I don't really understand,  
because I have always been loved,  
worshipped and adored,  
my secret weapon  
to poverty and disgrace,  
I live in a house of love,  
and the women I love  
know this, are drawn to it,  
they do not want more of their kind,  
they rather eat with me,  
shop with me,  
they notice if I carry a linen tote  
or string bag for the vegetables  
though alone I just carry  
everything in my arms  
and alone I don't even think  
of anything besides  
croissants, bread and butter,  
chocolate, cheese.  
When I am with women

I am a different woman,  
with Marie I am like her,  
elegant and scared, with Coral  
I pretend to love to walk  
because I do love to walk with her,  
so sprightly and noticing,  
and with Heather  
I am self-conscious  
about her magazine glossy  
hair and skin, it seems to me  
to be irrefutable evidence  
of high breeding,  
like the air and blood and water  
inside her is so clean,  
without a wisp  
of despair. I publish Sofia's poems,  
though she lives in Mexico City  
and I have not seen her in five years,  
in pictures she still looks beautiful,  
I think we are entering the marvelous time  
where we are forming our final face  
but still look young,  
how lovely it is to shed all awkwardness  
and baby fat and baby hairs,  
and look like women,  
and talk about affairs, jobs, men, children,  
nothing yet decided, not really,  
not when we still love each other,  
other women, I mean,  
before that goes away,  
falls from us  
like a dress.



*White Petals*  
*for Kim Hyesoon*

The blue creeping out  
of trees  
the blue filling  
the lamps  
I'll call those things  
my cats

The tear running down your face  
the dry cracking  
I feel inside  
*Love you Love you*  
the white petals  
floating down

Others call  
my voice  
*Love you Love you*  
falling down to earth  
is it only to me the branch looks so lonely  
in winter

“White Petals” borrows two lines from Hyesoon Kim: “I’ll call those things my cats” is a title of one of her poems in her book, *Poor Love Machine*, and the line “*Love you Love you*” is from her poem, “Winter Tree,” from the same book.

*Faint with Love*

I look at what  
I wrote yesterday

And god I must have been having a mental breakdown—  
after the parade  
my friends and I waited for our dinner  
on the restaurant  
balcony,  
the street wet  
except for  
paper bits,  
petals on a black  
wet ezra pound  
and shit

Today the reddest  
Pear  
was like holding  
November—

November  
red light in a room  
A fire without heat or rage  
like a heart in a surgeon's hands

Amethyst  
was said to be the color  
of dionysus's tears

What can I say but  
Youth  
was the color of your lips

All night long on my bed  
I looked for you  
I looked for you but did not find you

If you see him  
will you tell him  
I am faint with love

That I turned the sheets  
and found anemones  
frozen in the snow

“Faint with Love” borrows lines from Ecclesiastes: “All night long on my bed/ I looked for the one my heart loves;/ I looked for him but did not find him.” (“Song of Solomon 3:1-5)

*daddy song*

1

the song of a daddyist  
who had daddy in her heart  
cried cried cried in her lonely heart  
until it had a daughter of its own

the perfumes wafted up  
the terraces from the orange trees  
she stood up on her ladder  
and cut off her nose

that's why  
the perfumes became  
twinged with metallic pungent blood

eat sushi  
wash your hair  
daddy  
daddy  
drink sake

2

the song of a daddyist  
who shrugged and said when I gamble I'm not happy I'm not sad  
I feel nothing held his thumb up  
on the merritt parkway

blanched by headlights  
grey suit black trees  
gentlemanly Gucci glasses  
no suitcase

two quarters in his pocket  
4 in the morning  
my daddy

doesn't ask  
what are you doing with my tie  
blue stripes

3

the song of a blue tie  
34 and  $\frac{3}{4}$  neck

knotted  
loosened

a snake can wrap around  
your heart like a song  
can enter like a song  
lies next to you in bed

head to tail  
measuring  
length to length  
to eat you

stiff,  
sweat-shaped in the back of the closet  
blue snake  
still  
but you know it's there

“daddy song” is an homage to Tristan Tzara’s “dada song.” The third line is a line from “Lucky” by Britney Spears but can also be changed if there are copyright issues.

*white horse*

the dream detains me  
at the border  
a cop on a white horse  
caresses his baton

I know you watch  
border porn he says  
behind a low white fence  
I watch him get down

I think of my black phone  
its sleek emotionless face  
how it betrayed me  
searching with one hand

I think of all the men  
who have called for me  
the grass is wet  
and long, it crawls up my knees

'there can only be one ending'  
a voice booms in the sky  
the dream's narrator is the same  
man from love island (UK)

of course my perpetrator  
is a Don Quixote type

I start running across the field  
what's the difference between a field and a meadow  
maybe a meadow is British

why do I know what it feels like  
when I've never run across a meadow  
I'm not Theresa May  
I'm not swirling in a field of wheat

when the fat white horse  
catches up with me  
I'll pretend to be into it  
I'll look it in the eye

like I do to my doctor  
asking for Xanax  
the perfect amount of okay

but deserving of mercy

thick white mane in my hands

'look at her go'

the voice booms from the purple mountains

the race is on