

Let Me Tell You How You Talk



**Anthology by the Writers' Seminar at
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Insomnia

I dread evenings. I dread evenings because evenings lead to nighttime and nighttime leads to nightmares and I have this recurring dream where all my loved ones die in my sleep. One by one. Most recently it was Mum. She developed an illness that caused her to gradually crumble and deteriorate into the atmosphere. And in this dream, we all knew she was getting weaker, but one day there was news from the doctor that a windstorm was approaching and Mum might just disappear from one second to the next.

So I'm running down the sidewalk to say my goodbyes before it's too late. Feet moving swiftly along a sand-colored sidewalk until I realize that the sidewalk is pulling backward with each step I take, dragging me rearward into a sand floor, sand sky, sand fingers that disintegrate into the air encased by sand walls. And deep down, I know I am chasing something that doesn't exist. It's too gray. Something that, no matter how desperately I try to persuade it, it refuses to reach back out to me.

I am particles of sand that float in a multiverse somewhere – I was not whole enough to be a rock but maybe one day this body of mine will form sediment, lining the fresh-water floor of Moosehead Lake, Maine. This is where we scattered Mum's ashes in my dream. Perhaps it is then, in this alternate reality, that my soul can reunite with my dear mother's.

Or maybe we will meet again as two wine glasses at a dinner party – mine cracked down the side and hers overflowing with the blood of a twisted temperance. Except in this world too, the kitchen will go up in smoke long before I notice the red and orange whispers. Blackened meat and stale bread rolls – I don't know if it was the kitchen or us that should have been left better attended. The fire brigade looks for charred skin but can only find crumbs. I put them in a cheap nickel locket with the sand and the sediment, a mezcla of mother and daughter. I hope our metal-chain communion is quiet; we have already been so loud and so silent. But I fear it will leave verdant swamp and fever stretched across my neck.

Natalie Diaz said, "I don't call it sleep anymore. I'll risk losing something new instead." But I'd prefer to renounce the hours each night. In fact, I think I'd like to try floating again, which is why I don't sleep anymore. And so I'll lie awake in an evergreen darkness-like numbness-like, like...a corpse. Without means to adjust my tangled cotton bedsheets that stick to my skin or flip my pillow to the cool side. Lying there, hot flesh warm hair, a static writhing that stems from the base of my belly and spirals around my ribcage and broad of the back encroaching upon me.

I want to trace the scar on my mum's back. Take my two fingers and glide across the sensationless graft with a gentle yet firm pressure that will mean nothing to her. I will ask if I can crawl back inside. Is it wrong to admit I once wanted to leave? Of course, I know entertaining such a thought is as absurd as believing my dreams are real, but somehow I keep waking up with sand in my eyes and ruby streaks across a sage neck, torn from wet fingertips.

Over and over again, my dreams snag at the bare soles of my feet as iridescent thorns until my ankles shake – limp limbed knuckle knees and snap-crackle-pop wrist bone – the

sand-colored sidewalk disentangling into sediment and dragging me down into the garden weeds,
leaving only verdant swamp and fever hung, like a noose, around my restless neck.