When the Speed of Light Slows Down I Notice

by

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Generalized Anxiety Disorder

As you sit in this room you’re surrounded by those who smile, the pulsing inner-cavity of self runs from head to toe. Four smiling faces to the left drown in the green stained sofa. One lolls on the torn cushion to the right of your knee. In front of you stands a record player, spinning wildly and blaring blends of drums and guitar which is just softer than the screeching sirens emanating from the dusty television that sits only inches under the drop-ceiling. A rumbling comes from the heater pipes snaked in the walls. And still, in this room, a carnival of popping balloons and wood-cutting competitions. Of metal scraping on mirror plates and floating glass tables. Of lullaby boxes and squeaking dog toys. Still, what comes through, loudly, is your heart--pounding.
Day Dreaming Before Morning Coffee

I take a piece of toast
and scrape a lump
of butter onto it

I scrape once
and then twice
before a first taste

It taste good
to me but I already
knew it would

Already knew it
would after I swallowed
my first sip of coffee

As I already knew
when waking in bed
the coffee would burn

As I already knew
when lying in bed
I would daydream

Imagining the walls
of my room green
instead of the gray

Wood-cage that holds
in the purple roses
swaying on my ceiling

Or imagining my skeleton
being used as a raft
to sail along the Rio Grande

And find myself in a place
with beds of flowers
cushioning my outstretched arms

As they swirl into a ring
of fire burning the shimmers
of color into my bloodless face

I wondered how this burning
would differ from the burning of my 7AM coffee
Seconds Before Birthday

All eyes fall on
2 shot glasses
Filled to the rim
with red liquid
Sitting side by side
upon the marble counter
To the left of
the oven clock
Which shines the
green lit time
11:59
After Sex

It feels nice to hear the humming of the fan
and to be cushioned under the blanket

And I enjoy the quiet space without the television
no music to run over my thoughts

I have no worries at all and no stress creeping up
forget the laundry and forget the groceries too

I just sit here and look left to notice the closed books on the shelf
and I look right to see an opened imprint in the pillow on my empty side
The Wallet

Placed on the wooden desk

No pictures
no money
no change
only expired
credit cards
a few pieces
of paper
with telephone
numbers on
them crinkled
receipts torn
leather brown
and faded

Perched on the wooden desk
near the broken stapler
and a fax machine
useless objects of bankruptcy
imagination rant of a moment’s wake at 3am

An empty jar
as dark
as a bowling
ball hole
taste of tannin
the spread
of car leather
on toast
grains of rice
fall on tin
cans on mountain
tops of muffin goo
sludge hands
sweat small
desert lands
in autumn
clock red 3 burning
squid eyes swirl
and find water
glass on chair
branded genitals
clench legs
turn into goose
feathers nest
boy in mirror
hands on knife
head down again
under rock in cold spot
I had a long conversation with myself

In the shower

When I stepped out

I decided to wipe the steam off the mirror
Waiting to Hold the Hands of Winter

Outside the window
there’s no snow

There are no carrot-like icicles dangling from the rooftops
no painful, pin-piercing gusts of cold air
no balls of snow thrown by rowdy children

Outside the window
there’s no noise

Not a single song from the neighborhood carolers
no boots packing snow no crunching steps to be heard
and the scraping from steel runners didn’t arrive

Outside the window
there was no spirit

Mrs. Clemen’s house was missing its colorful lights
smiling snowmen were not standing on lawns
left over snow angels didn’t line the streets

Outside the window
there was no winter color

No daylight grays in the light sky
no shimmering gold bells atop the mailbox
no white

Looking outside the window
I couldn’t feel my hands getting numb
nor could I see my cold swirling breath
as I stood near the plastic pine tree
and wished for something brutal to come before winter’s end
Two Letters Gossiping on Death

I.

When death arrives, I want to feel it.
Like a knife slicing between my shoulder blades.
Like a rock swiftly thrown towards
the back of my head.

When death arrives, I want to taste it.
Like a spoonful of blood running down my throat.
Like throwing back a shot
of anti-freeze.

When death arrives, I want to see it.
Like closeness of a blood red moon.
Or the violent sea crashing
against the shore rocks.

When death arrives, I want to hear it.
The fearful roar of a plummeting plane.
The quietness before the
hands of a storm.

When death arrives, I want to know its scent.
Like a newborn’s used clothing.
Like urine
on stained carpet.

When death arrives, I want to know him
and know that I have not merely touched
the surface of this world. I want to know him,
like I don’t even know myself.
II.

I laughed at Death
Oh yes, oh yes
I laughed at Death
Oh yes, oh yes
Almost got killed by a great big mess
Oh yes, oh yes
But Still
I laughed at death

Didn’t see it comin’ nowhere
Oh yes, oh yes
Little lady almost knock me off the road
Oh yes, oh yes
But in the end I live to tell what be told
Oh yes, oh yes

I laughed at Death
Almost got killed by a great big mess
Oh yes
But still
I laughed at Death
Before Sex

You place the candle light atop the dresser
behind pictures of your mother and father and brother
Because you’re afraid to burn
We lie together like scattered crumpled dollars
watching some bedtime movie in the dark
The television light drowns the helms of your eyes
looking almost green or brown or gray
I’ve never seen my reflection in them
I curl my fingers up your arm and lift your shirt sleeve
exposing a birthmark eye in the center of a bruise
Thinking about the cut scars on your body
I drop my eyes from your knotted green hair
to the ripples of your t-shirt and shorts
With a pillow between your legs you ask me
if I’m enjoying the movie
I can only wonder how am I supposed to protect you
Revenge

She said, I hope the Devils
    lose this game tonight.
Why, I said

we live in Hoboken New Jersey
    not in
Tampa Florida. That’s
a distance from here.
    About 1,124 miles
from here, to be more accurate.

Because John is a Devils
    fan, of course
she said

I recently read (pointing
    at the television above
the bar) it’s healthy
to release your anger
    on the world that reminds
you of an ex-lover.

She cracked a peanut
    in her hand,
pieces of wood and thread
covered her palm until
    she flicked
the waste onto the ground.

Picking the seed out of her
    hand, I said
but then doesn’t their world
become the one you see
    when your eyes shut
and you leave the pieces behind.

I suppose (placing the nut
    on her tongue) we think
differently about what we see, she said.

She looked at the screen above
    the bar. Her soft eyes
reflecting numbers and lights.
Her grin, a perfect resemblance
of sun lighting moon.
The stars on her shoulders
delicate to her laugh. When
the Devils lost she turned
to me and I caught the nearness of
her brows. And the odd point of
the tip of her nose. Her book-like
chin barely supporting a dropping jaw.

Two spider hands reached for the glass
of poison on the bar table,
disappointed in the temperature of the drink.
Looking for the Man in My Father

When you were young you
sold hash to all the cool
boys and girls in the neighborhood
who wore ripped jeans and listened
to Neil Young.

This story sits behind the bar counter
next to the bottles of Jack and Johnny Walker
only mother could share it after a few shots
and a fight and a hit of weed.

You also leave out what made you marry
mom when we talk about your wedding.
She was six months pregnant on the day
and wore tulips under her white dress.

When brother left you didn’t hesitate
to burn all of his paintings even though
you paid for his art school and let him
know of every ache in your fingers.

As a child I learned to write my thoughts.
I leaned my head towards a closed window.

I traced myself onto a small sheet
of paper and couldn’t begin to show
you the eraser marks just outside
the lines that held myself together.

And now when we sit in the same room I
keep my eyes from staying too long
on any part of your face. I want to
tell you we have failed together.

We should speak ourselves into each other.
An avalanche of split wood, we are quiet.
Placing Your Hand on My Head

Yesterday my barber put a nick in the back of my head.

_C’mom now boy_
quit the fidget and let me work.

George can speak to me like that. He was my cutter since I was a child.

Placing his hand on my head. Stretching and shaking the tender parts of my scalp.

It always made me nervous, the nearness. I couldn’t take the buzzing in my ears.

He twisted my neck until he could get the right angle he needed.

The buzzing came close, I looked to see my father stepping into the mirror.

His eyes pierced my skin like wood splinters under the cutters in George’s hands.

My cheeks and bones straight with fire until my eyes turned away.

The nearness of the buzzing made me move. It caught a nick in my head.

George said:
_C’mom now boy_
Why won’t you let me get close
The First Time Seeing You

Mom, you always knew how to pull along a smile just like the way you pulled Jessica and me in our plastic toy wagon that I named Ruth the Rocket ship.

Stubborn and alone in my teen-age years, I heard mouse squeaks coming from inside your bedroom locked behind a white streaked door. You could only be watching television.

Mom, you were never weak in the morning before leaving for work and accidently forgetting the running faucet and steaming pot of coffee that perfumed the first floor of the house.

How could I forget the time when you returned to work the day after you tripped on the last porch step and stained the stone pathway with your blood?

You wore scratch marks across the bridge of your nose and down the stitching of your grin. Living quietly with dreams behind your locked door and in family photos.

I never thought you might need glasses after the eye exam you took last month but I heard the background squeaks during my last phone-call checkup.

I know I should’ve called before the visit. But seeing you sit there with tears in your eyes, no strength to dissemble the indulgence of a dragging heart. Sagging face and washed away smiles. So tired.

I never knew I could see you be so delicate, mom.
Unaware of What Surrounds Me

I.

It’s hard to believe Frederick Douglass didn’t grab a blade and pick the apple from his master’s throat when the son-of-a-bitch was raping his Aunt Hester. And it’s hard to believe no standing shadow shot a knuckle-closed fist at Izola Ware Curry’s jaw when she unsealed King Jr’s chest with a letter opener. How is it that no man no woman stood guard for Malcom X after his home bloomed fire buds on February 14th 1965? Gun shots! Gun shots on February 21st 1965. Muslim men fired carnation petals into the stage and no one saw them, and no one heard them. Like how no one heard Trayvon’s tears strike the pavement after the falling of a 99 cent iced tea can and a pack of skittles. And who held Freddie Gray’s spine in the air to show the public why twisted steel and blood-stained shards littered the streets of Baltimore. Who could raise the flag and repeat and shout and repeat? Who could believe that this history is real?
II.

It was at her grandmother’s house.
I was reading *Black No More*
by George Schuyler.

*At first I thought it was because she was old.*

She asked me if I was reading
about black she asked if I
were reading about black jack.

*I thought it was because she was old.*

The cover stood firm and faced
her: a young black man losing
the complexion of his skin.

*I thought it a joke because she was old.*

I told her it was about black…
I told her but the cover said
it all. But I told her anyway.

*I knew what they were saying, but they were old.*

She told her husband I was reading
about black jack. He asked
why but knew what I was reading.

They laughed in circles
and I felt the mockery slither
across the floor.

*I felt it, but stood silent.*
The Face of a Man Who Tries to Hide Regret

With such
sagging slopes
for circular cheeks.

At the bar,
at the bar!

(You Spoke!
You spoke!)

With a quivering tongue
you struggled
to speak solemnly.

(Oh you shrewd you,
shrew you,
oh shoo you!
my little magoo you.)

Slowly speaking,
disquieting all
the listeners in the corners.

Yet that face!

Frail in every gesture
and white… pale

Cracked skin
and skinny… gaunt

Falling down
and droopy… limp

That face,
it spoke rue
to be heard by our hearts.
Awake after Months of Being Away

I didn’t understand sex until
I cheated.

Late at night holding your
hands, twisted balls of yarn.

I wasn’t holding
myself until I let
go. Feeling pillows
with loose threads.

I couldn’t see your
shadow near
the dresser, but
the door opened
enough for me to hear
you go.

I told you how she
looked at me in the morning
made a smile
that twisted like wood.

Pancakes are your favorite
especially when I make syrup.

she said,
opening the fickle buds
in my hands. Stiff as they are
and should be.

She plucked the dried sugar
from my palms

placing it on her tongue.
Her fingers pulled

the threads of my knuckles.
The sting reminded me
of you. It reminded me
that I never let myself

know the taste. Letting go
of her fingers

I told her
sugar wasn’t good for me.

She left a honey trail
behind the nest near the door.

I grabbed a mop so you wouldn’t slip
when you returned.
Hip-Hop Show

This is where I take a break.
Such a nice place to be drunk
in the seconds after dark
after my thoughts hear a thunk.

This is where I can hear them all.
The whoop-de-woos and snap-de-snaps,
all the coughing and the chuckling
won’t subside in the mix of raps.

The stage, just a hollow home
with four busted lights hanging
above graffiti curtains.
Weed stained hands grab the standing.

Big blocks fall onto the hands
blood smears like jelly in my
childhood sandwich during lunch
And four big men say, “Get by-

Get by!” At the hip-hop show
broken glass pricks at bare feet
like splinters in the backyard
like summer heat on the street.

So this is where I take a break
where I see hands grab for home
slapping an ass or maybe face,
comes the “fuck you’s” or “oh babies.”

Teeth shinning are made of chrome.
Ladies look back at me,
a break to hear all the rants.
I swoop a girl closely, my hands in her pants.
Physiognomy

Take care
to notice
love is not only a mouth

Notice eyes
and eyeteeth
and lips

Words cannot
say everything

I love
you

When words
hold on to
such nothingness

How can you
trust so much
so little

Without glancing
at the gaps between
nose and cheek and chin

Which has
spaces to be
touched

Take care to
notice the crease
between lip and lip

Be careful
of what
it says

I love
you

Again the
cleft of
affection
Poetry

Which once was blue skies
holding serendipitous swirls
of floating froth (a cloud,
to me) which was being shaped
by my nephew’s daydreaming daze.
I gaze into a lachrymose sky
drveling into view. While he
points to a shapeless pile of ice-
crystals made of water and things:

_I see a bird, perched on the tallest
sail of a schooner._

A blend of gray meeting brown
and opaque blue shifted in direction
of his schooner. His eyes, glazed
with innocence, watched as the maelstrom
of color slowly dismembered the parts
of his boat. His eyes, transfixed and riveted
in place, witnessed his daydream dissolve.
He turned his eyes to me and implicitly
requested my chapter of his dream.

_I see a poem, just something
to put on paper._
An Innocence at the Park

A little girl

sits on
a patch
of dirt

fingers pebbles
and cups a family
of ants
Closer to the Blade

Upright in a burgundy leather chair the barber put me.

Four years now I have visited Eric every two weeks for a cutting. It was hard for me to say much about this fellow other than his obvious idiosyncrasies. He clears his throat at least twice for every sentence spoken. He always clips his scissors three times in the air before he begins a cutting. He picks at his fingernails while he waits for a customer to pay for the service. But a nice fellow, a genuine fellow. I’m sure nothing more than an honest husband and friend.

There isn’t much else that I know about the barber. Four years now he hasn’t said much to me. A casual joke here and there and maybe a smile after the cutting. But it was hard to get much out of ole Eric. I would ask how the family was, but he would only respond by telling me they were grand and happy. An honest fellow ole Eric was.

Now sitting upright in his burgundy leather chair; three clips he does before he begins the cutting. Just as usual, a few clips and nothing else heard but the tick tocking grandfather clock in the corner of the shop. Nothing spoken until he suddenly asks me if I know anything about death. Confused by the question that ole Eric poses, I ask him what ever does he mean?

He tells me that he knows quite a lot about death. Ole Eric tells me that he has seen all kinds of men come into the shop. Men who he had known for years who once had full heads of hair and now are left with thinning piles of dried and dead strings. Ole Eric clears his throat a few more times before continuing. Men who he had seen have piles of hair on the floor after a cutting and was then reduced to just a few strands. He explains how the pile starts so large until there is nothing left. He tells me he sees death like this every day.

Astonished by the confiding of ole Eric, I ask him what he thinks about all the death that he sees. He smiles, clears his throat a couple times and tells me he thinks about how easy it would be to send these men to their death. He holds up the pair of scissors, he raises a beard razor to my eyes. He tells me how much power he has over these withering men. All the power lies right in his hands.

He clears his throat a little more and finishes up the cutting. Tilted in the burgundy leather chair the barber puts me. He sharpens the beard razor again and again before looking back at me. Ole Eric. A good fellow, an honest fellow.
Under the Spring Night Boulder

In the spring
all night can be seen.

The luminous moon
exposes new born leaves.

Baby rabbits stiffen
in high grass.

Flying insects cloud
into shaded spots in the starlight.

And yet, something remains unseen:

The folks
who were confined
to their blankets
because of winter’s
frigid winds.

They stay hidden
from cardinals
fresh with red death
where the moths
rest their wings.

Hidden from swinging
worms that spray
silk on branches
hanging above dandelions
blown by the spring breeze.

And hidden
from the possums
stiff as cut wood
on the spines
of darkened
fences.

The sun and its refining
light shines on the butterfly
colors of spring’s day,
mixing balloons and
soap bubbles.

But now the moon
reveals different things:
Such as the young girl
who peeks out her night window.

Or the greenish
scratches on Mr. Bard’s
1995 Jaguar. Parked
in front of the gate
that sings to the moon breeze.
I’ve held words full of enchantment.
Words that factitiously
reach for the palms
of Helena and Katherina

And words that drivel
golden spittle.
Words that rhyme
and rhyme very little.

But I’ve heard yours.
Soaked in blood and soot
that shape the blossoming
flower by the hour.
The Weather of Time

I was eager to see the old man, for it had been years since my last visit. To my recollection of the last family gathering, the weather was wonderful: a bright blue spring sky cloudless and sweet. A mirror of today. While driving south, I decided to listen to songs on an old iPod. An iPod that was full of music from the 60’s and 90’s. It was the music of my youth, the music of my humble memories. I decided to listen to the Beatles because they were the old man’s favorite. When I was just a child, he would place a Beatles record on a vinyl player and tell me to come close as he rocked methodically in his chair. I always knew when one of his favorite songs would come on because he would extend his right arm out with martini glass in hand and say, “taste a sip.” I play Julia on my car stereo and think about how I can share a taste with him now and enjoy it.

Driving through the old man’s neighborhood made me realize the weather of time. Convenient stores were now supermarkets, single level houses were now two, smooth roads became cracked and neglected. Maybe some of these new findings were always here but just out of my sight. I took some time with myself during this drive and thought-back to my childhood. You’re never aware of the person you have grown to be until you take a driving trip to a place of your past. So I took notice of the dilapidation that went by the glass of my window. And I saw a new place that wedged itself in-between my childhood and my present. However, the old man’s house seemed untouched. The small tomato garden remained on the right side near the driveway. The same cracks lined along the concrete stairs leading to the front door and the house’s siding still burned a deep red color. I took my first step forward and breathed in the smell of Thanksgiving, Christmas Eve, birthdays, etcetera.

I entered to first give my love to Aunt Beth. She had gained some weight since my last visit. Her hair now with purple streaks and a dark brown that was nearly indistinguishable from once being color black. Next was my Uncle Paul. He acquired some new gray wings which accentuated the receding hairlines that sliced the corners of his temples. I shook his hand firmly and followed it with a hug. His new handshake was a small sign that he too recognized the difference in time when gazing his eyes upon me. My three cousins: Joe, Justin, and Edward now stood near six feet tall. They stood and quietly acknowledged my presence with a cool “What’s up.” It was an odd experience to see these three young men come to their age of “cool.” Only yesterday I had been reaching across the counter to grab cookies for them because they could not reach the top. Figaro, the cat who looked like an alien but who had the beauty of prince charming according to the old man, had become immobile. He was so large I had mistaken him for a dog. But his bent whiskers and crooked smile made me realize he acknowledged my presence.

Finally, I made my way to him. The old man looked untouched, but the rosacea spots on his moon face was the only thing that aged him in the years. It was the old man who would be the first to rise from a seat when I arrived at these visits, but now he sat silent and still with crocodile eyes that never met mine. And in the past it was he whose face I would see searching in the crowd for mine, and now the old man was stacked on a stone torso, holding a hot dog with a mountain of mustard on top that began to spill on the floor. He wiped his mouth with his torn checkered shirt sleeve. He belched loudly and let
cola flow in streams down his chin. Staring from feet away, the old man sat and watched the blackness of an empty television set. He focused on the movement that it reflected inside a 32 inch box. I came to see the man I remembered, but time had weathered him away.
When the Speed of Light Slows Down I Notice

It’s the speed of things that is so enchanting. I saw a baby crawling away from her mother in a park while the mother was speaking to her partner. Without hesitation, without looking at the child, she quickly scooped the little girl in her hands. How did she do that? I wondered. I do not quite understand the reflexes of a parent. Nor do I understand how our eyes can catch a star racing across the night sky amongst a cluster of idled shimmers of light. I see myself in the future when I read of Spirit and Opportunity’s exploration on Mars. I see myself traveling at the speed of light and spotting everything that floats by my portal.
Interest: Finding my Man in the Moon

When we were children we were told that there was a man in the moon. Or that it’s made of cheese, till Bobby pulled his pants down to show the moon.

I looked up to see what those craters could be in the darkest circles, till I went on my first date with Miss Laura and stared at the light of the moon.

It spies with its spotlight on the night I broke my first bone in the river near the rocks we jumped off, I juggled my bones on the reflection of the moon.

Inside the mirror I covered my eyes from the lunar light as it blinded my sight when I decided to give her the ring and stop looking for the man in the moon.

And I’m left wondering if the moon is made of rocks or atoms or molecules. And how I can remember where I am and if I can find out in the moon.
I Might Know a Man

I know you think you might know a man, Bob. But let’s take

a few more drinks
so we can find
out who that guy really is.

After we get out of the darkness that surrounds this damn bar

let’s steal that big goddamn car out
thr

why buy
when we
cn steal

we both grew up poor
and we can fight against it
by taking that damn car

on the rd
and nabbing a botl of jack

Now hurry up
gtn
I’ll take us

Shut up
I ain’t swerving

who the hell you think you are

Bill I know where I’m goin
You just figure out where you are
A Meeting Place Between your Mind and the Sky

I know you, viewer,
who sits under the leaning
tree in the old park.

Who watches the geese
swiftly dart their bills
into the drying dirt.

While the weary
children run past their
mothers and towards the sun.

You stare at the rabbits
covered in cut grass
who flee from their walking visitors.

Walk, walk, walk; walking towards
the green. Cover your eyes.
Imagine each step falling
onto a single blade of grass.
Even smaller, a black ant
crawling on the soiled war-zone.

Or even the unknown glop
of pink gum that rests on
half the Nike sign of a shoe.

Then sudden rain-
drops scatter.

And viewer isn’t it fun
to see those run?

How heavy are your clothes?
Like the green knight’s armor?

Now, now viewer. Do not
leave. Do not mistake these
occurrences as interruptions.

I close your eyes,
the ants shut the door
on their hill.
The birds pull a roof
ever their nests and
quiet their young.

The ocean floods
you upon a raft
that floats you towards new land.
A Goodbye on the Wrong Day and Wrong Night

Not until the end can you hear a goodbye or place my mind in the bottom of this well full of mixed emotions that crack the morning bell. I can’t find tangibility to lend my body to die nor can my last bleeding book be found. Under piles of tissue paper resides the void where fragments of impressions wait overjoyed in simplicity’s state where my voice is bound. Replace myself with a heart of stone locked in disarray by the sea that forces itself to find the day and night in recourses to replace my way and hear the light moan. The dawn comes to burn these tears away or find a moment to return on the night that shrinks my senses into a single sight until those moments of purity are a lost day. A goodbye on the wrong day and wrong night, a goodbye on the wrong day and goodnight.