

## To My Stepmother,

I love your yellow hair. Your smooth strands drenched in the seething sunlight. The big curls bouncing against your cheek, like leaves leaning against a luscious flower. When we flew across the globe to you, my father dyed his hair. Three days of bleach left his fingertips white like a corpse in water. Washing. Washing. Washing. Until the black was all squeezed from his coarse strands—slipping through his fingers in patches. When he came out of the bathroom, his hair was dead. But he grinned like a new man. *A start*. He said with his flaming scalp.

I love your smile. A block of white, straight teeth. A set of azure eyes. A pair of lips, red and royal. Your eyes are too sweet. Do you know how many people fall deep into their brilliance? The lighthouse from beyond the rocks, an expanse of blue but also past the blue and deeper into that uncoiling riptide—into the yellow and green underneath.

Oh, you definitely do.

My father wears your red smile on his shirts, and his eyes follow yours in their long, black reflections. If bleach can turn burned brown into blue, he would have poured it into his sockets. If bleach could straighten the fumble of his tongue saying your language, he would have gotten drunk on that bottle every evening. I love your voice—that stretches to beyond the house and leads my father to your feet. It tells me pretty aspirations just like it told him. Bigger dreams and larger things that I should strive for. A square hat. A pile of dead foliage green. A large house with a tall white fence. A tiny waist and the smell of morning dew on an emerald lawn. I love listening to you. Before I go to bed and when I walk past the glass giants on the street. When I try and jump for the stars.

But as I am next to my window I watch the birds as they soar. An eagle cries out, like a beckon or an insult; it is a fragile sky that I reach but can't seem to grasp on to. The clouds always float away between my fingers at last like the smokes in the mirror of your vanity. And the sun revealed behind is bright but glaring. Do you know how you have changed me? I hope you do. My mother tells me about sacrifice, and you tell me about choice. My mother tells me about responsibility, and you tell me about freedom. She is like the ink feathering out on a piece of parchment—steady and smooth. She keeps me warm and caged in a restricted sanity.

*You* are the bonfire in July and the loud, twisted, dancing bodies on the beach, by the rocks—moving and crackling. You drive me into the flames. My mother has everything laid out for me like the strokes of a brush and the hard, set lines of characters and rankings. She offers me everything on the ground through a single path—trodden by many and of hardened dirt and stacked stone. You gave me a pair of wax wings and threw me into the sky, like a lopsided bug chasing after

the sunset—doomed to fall at any moment. To plummet and shatter.

I hate my mother when she leads me to the unchangeable road, but I hate myself when you leave me choking in the sky—dying so close to the sunshine and among the flight of birds. No, I hate myself for believing in flying.

But hopefully you know how you have won. My dad and I ran from my mother and her sacrifices and responsibilities, her cold walls and mundane grounds. We are now here with you. And while I still look like her, you have too much of my insides for me to go back. You have sucked her out of me with the same bottle of bleach. You and your colours splattered all over my eyes, my hands, my mind. Red. Blue. White. Yellow and Green. The fire is burning and the birds are flying. I stand in your house and cry in front of all this freedom. Then I stand up and become a canvas to your palette.