

## Is there Anybody Out There?

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There is no present or future—only the past, happening over and over again—now.

— Eugene O'Neill, *A Moon for the Misbegotten*

*The current wraps itself around her and takes her with such sudden, muscular force it feels as if a strong man has risen from the bottom, grabbed her legs and held them to his chest. She appears to be flying, a fantastic figure, arms outstretched, hair streaming.*

Adam hates to have me write a word.

Adam loved everything about me, that I was independent and cool.

Adam wanted to know everything about my past, my dreams and hopes.

Adam believed in me, in a way that no one else ever had.  
Adam sang love songs for me.  
From the very beginning.

## I

The radiance of the sunset dwindles and dies.

I like watching what happens outside through the ocular, you know, as a housewife locked in a cage. It's a big, airy room, the whole floor nearby, with windows that look all ways, and air, sunshine and moonlight galore. I don't remember the time when I started to notice there are spots in the walls. It's stripped off - I mean the paper. I never saw a worse paper in my life.

I hear a strange sound. It sounds like a kitten was crushed by a speeding car. But there's no kitten in this community, I guess. Then I find it comes from the building on the other side of the road. What I know about that family is that it is a family with a daughter. That little girl practices violin every morning and ballet every evening, as if she can escape from her parents' screaming and fighting. But now, that girl is sitting in the dark, alone, no more ballet, no more. I get a glimpse of an ambulance waiting downstairs, in discomfort glare red, wailing.

I hear from the crowd downstairs. The girl's drunken father whipped her mother with a leather belt.

*My mother died when I was about six. Every time when I threw myself on her apron, I smelled vanilla, sugary but bitter. But I didn't know why did the smell of vanilla start to fade away. Instead, uncomfortably intoxicating stink permeated the whole family. I did notice that there was a bruise on her cheek, a twin to the one on mine. It is strange, right? The twin bruises. My mother used to have the most flawless cheek and smile I've ever known. But since the bruise crawled onto her cheek, no more smile on her face. And I saw she crying in the bathroom, burring her head into her arms, like a baby. I wanted to touch her, hug her and kiss her. But my father just pushed me away as if my mother was poisonous and dirty. Since then, I tried so hard to get away from where I lived. I wrote, I danced, I didn't believe in anyone. I had no friend, no lover. But Adam did well to create a roomy atmosphere of trust between us and walk into my heart. He confessed his secrets. His stepfather didn't talk to him. When he saw other fathers buying balloons for their children, he drew one red balloon for himself cause he never got a real one. He had to drop out of school in seventh grade, and he'd spent nearly 20 years rebuilding his life, just like what I did.*

I don't sleep much at night, for it is so interesting to watch. I sleep in the daytime. It is perplexing and tiresome in the daytime. Time to sleep now, talk to you later, my dear friend.

## II

It is moonlight. The moon shines in all around just as the sun does. I look out of the window as usual.

I keep watching, taking a sip of Widow's Kiss, apple brandy, angostura bitters, and ice. Then I notice a woman in a crimson velvet dress arranging a dinner. As I recall, she likes wearing black oversized shirts. But today, she looks stunning. She arranges such a wonderful dinner with candles, white roses and two cups of red wine. The lady walks toward the door, and then she comes to the cupboard to turn on the CD player. She starts to dance. She dances through the curtains and sways and turns round and round and round. When the music ends, she comes back to the table. She unfolds the napkin, picks up the fork and knife, slightly cut the beef, and dips it in the vanilla sauce. She takes up the cup, and proposes a toast to the air.

No one else is inside the room.

*Before I met Adam, I didn't believe in that so-called marriage. I lived on my own. I never needed anyone when I was young. I went to the cinema alone, but I would buy a big box of popcorn as lovers do. I had no idea why couples love sharing that. It's so...so greasy. Oh, maybe because of its greasiness, couples have to share. Your happiness and sorrow had to share, just like the greasy popcorn. I cooked every Friday night, shutting down the phone, watching "Before Sunrise". Ironic. I didn't give a shit about relationships. But still, every Friday night. On Christmas night, I dialed the friends I've known, but nobody was home. Then I felt so insecure and love so obscure and distant.*

*I'll hold you close tonight*

*You're not alone*

*Don't you hold your tears inside*

*I'll never judge you*

*Let me be the one to come running,*

*Oh, cradle you from harm when you're running away...*

You must feel the same.

Oh no, silly girl. You can't do that. I know you are tired of being tough. I know you still need to have someone to hold you and comfort you. But, it will come. You see the glass bottle of red pills she held? It's hypnotic. I've taken these pills before.

At the right time, a song upstairs seduces my ears with soft string tones. The whole world became tamed, as well as she. She is sitting in the dark, in the candle's light, still.



"A Light", Photographed by Xu Ying-Jie

*I'll hold you close tonight  
You're not alone  
Don't you hold your tears inside  
I'll never judge you  
Let me be the one to come running,  
Oh, cradle you from harm when you're running away...*

She is tamed. Will she be okay? Perhaps. But I don't know. Dear friend, I feel a little dizzy. I feel it starting to take me. Where did everybody go? I need them now. To save me. There's something wrong with the paper and the wall tonight. I feel creepy. It seems there is a faint figure stooping down and creeping behind the pattern. It's a woman! She shakes the pattern bad as if she wants to get out. Where did everybody go? She needs some help.

### III

Lay down, and stretch upon the sea... stretch.

I have slept for several days and nights. Everything remains the same except that little girl who just lost her mother is locking herself in her room, writing, writing and writing, no more violin and ballet. And the woman has moved upstairs. She married a composer. She is falling into crazy love. But the good days don't last long. The composer gets drunk every night, gradually, every day. They start to have quarrels. The composer sings a song for his beloved, but beats her as well.

One night, I saw papers with love words and staves smashing into pieces, flying in the wind, in the moonlight. They sway and turn, and round and round and round. The photos of their wedding day are falling down to the ground, the shards of glass and frames are everywhere. It seems that neighbors are used to their quarrels. No one looks outside the window as before. It is just a normal war happening in a normal family.

Since then, I've seen that the composer's wife takes mysterious trips at night... and trunks, knives and saws and ropes. But, no sign of the composer, no more screaming, no more quarrels, no more crying. I have been lying for a long time. I kind of lose connection with what is happening outside. I can hear no sound except a harsh alarm whistle hovering between day and night, life and death.

At night, in any kind of light, lamplight, candlelight, and moonlight, the pattern becomes bars! And the woman behind is as

plain as she can be.

Adam's whisper used to smell like cranberry juice and vodka. When me and Adam were in love, we spent many a night huddled beneath the sheets wrapped in each other's arms. I liked to feel his blue veins bulgy and powerful as if they were going to burst forth. I thought the nights were long gone, but couple of months ago we went to New Zealand to visit Adam's friend. He put us up in a cabin in the middle of the bush. One night we went out. We got back to the cabin, we switched off the lights... and a giant bat was circling the room, just waiting to pounce on one little bit of exposed flesh, one bit of exposed, white flesh and suck it dry. So, that was one more night that we spent, huddled beneath the sheets, wrapped in each other's arms.

It's just a pity that it took a giant blood-sucking bat endlessly circling round the room to make that happen. There's something bad happened five days before our wedding. It was very early in the morning and I still wore my pajamas. I was working on my computer trying to finish an article, and I got frustrated, and then my anger became Adam's anger. He put both of his hands around my neck and squeeze so tightly that I could not breathe or scream, and he grabbed my hair and pushed my head repeatedly against the wall, again and again... I don't recall more details but the dizziness I will never forget for the rest of my life. But, five days later, the seven bruises on my neck had just faded, and I put on my mother's wedding dress, and I married him.

I chose a man who massaged my bruised ego.

I was sure we were going to live happily ever after, because I loved him.

I was a very strong woman in love with a deeply troubled man.

I was the only person on Earth who could help Adam face his demons.

I was wrong.

All of a sudden, I feel I am drowning in the black wave from the past. I think I have the power to get away from what my mother suffered, the psychological and physical trap. But it becomes uncontrollable. Suffocating.

My father used a leather belt to kill my mother when he was drunk Since then I started to write instead of speaking out what I saw and thought I used to live all by myself Even though I was alone in the Christmas night and arranging double-sets dinner with candles white roses and two glasses of red wine But I did feel sad that night what I could think of is taking red pills and died No one will even cry for me No funeral no flower But he did save me once In that night when I heard "Let me be the one to come running, oh, cradle you from harm when you're running away..." I felt I was alive Then I fell into crazy love with such a soulful composer and I knew that he had a name Adam It happened twice more on the honeymoon Even though he had pushed me down stairs had threatened to kill our kitten had held the cold loaded guns to my head had poured coffee grounds on my head as I dressed for an important

job interview I had been dreaming for a long time I never once thought of myself as a woman who will suffer from what my mother suffered I thought I could protect myself well But it just didn't work out I couldn't run away from the trap I was wrong Finally it happened He took out the gun again I felt colder than before I saw how scared I was through his blue eyes They used to look like clear crystals I could not take my eyes off his blue eyes when he sang love songs for me They were blinking But today I was so afraid of seeing these eyes as if they are the whirlpool which was going to swallow me I could smell the intoxicating alcohol stink in his shirt pants and hands the same stink of my father and my entire childhood Then I heard it a dull thud as the gun discharged

Sometimes I think there are a great many women behind the wall and sometimes only one and she crawls around heavily and fast And she is always trying to tear it apart but nobody could climb through that pattern There's nobody out there Nobody The mysterious trips at night trunks knives and saws and ropes did not exist The only truth is that me and you are trapped and no one is out there Dear friend to look life in the face and then to know it for what it is and last to know it to love it for what it is and then put it away Dear friend always the years between us always the years always the love, always the hours Gradually I seem to plunge into a limbo into a void a place where sanity and the unconscious blur In it I hear an unknown creature buzz I see things fade into distance and darkness

The Stillness in the Room  
Was like the Stillness in  
the Air--- Between the  
Heavens of Storm--  
With Blue---uncertain  
stumbling Buzz--- Between  
the light---and me---  
And then the Windows  
failed---and then I could  
not see to see---

I cannot see to see. But I can smell the vanilla. It smells sweet and sugary. And I can feel. I can feel I am flying, a faint figure, hair streaming, arms outstretched, in the overwhelming red. Thousands of me, stretching, and screaming.

## IV

The dawn, no  
birds around.  
Reborn, without a  
sound.  
Oh no, the fire drowned.

Ambulance is wailing in the discomfort glare red.  
Alarm whistle hovering over half of the sky.