

Sabrina Benaim's "Explaining My Depression to My Mother"

explaining my depression to my mother

(a conversation)

mom,

my depression is a shape shifter.

one day it is as small as a firefly in the palm of a bear,

the next it's the bear.

on those days i play dead until the bear leaves me alone.

i call the bad days the dark days.

mom says: try lighting candles.

when i see a candle

i see the flesh of a church,

the flicker of a flame

sparks of a memory younger than noon;

i am standing beside her open casket,

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it is the moment i learn

every person i ever come to know will someday die.

besides, mom, i'm not afraid of the dark.

perhaps that's part of the problem.

mom says: i thought the problem was that you can't get out of bed.

i can't.

anxiety holds me a hostage inside of my house, inside of my head.

mom says: where did anxiety come from?

anxiety is the cousin visiting from out of town

depression felt obligated to bring to the party.

mom, i am the party.

only i am a party I don't want to be at.

mom says: why don't you try going to actual parties. see your friends.

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sure, i make plans.

i make plans, but I don't wanna go.

i make plans because i know i should want to go.

i know sometimes i would have wanted to go.

it's just not that much fun having fun when you don't wanna have fun, mom.

you see, mom,

each night, insomnia sweeps me up in it's arms,

dips me in the kitchen in the small glow of the stove light.

insomnia has this romantic way of making the moon feel like perfect company.

mom says: try counting sheep.

but my mind can only count reasons to stay awake.

so I go for walks

but my stuttering kneecaps clank

like silver spoons held in strong arms with loose wrists,

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they ring in my ears like clumsy church bells, reminding me

i am sleepwalking on an ocean of happiness i cannot baptize myself in.

mom says: happy is a decision.

my happy is a high fever that will break.

my happy is as hollow as a pin-pricked egg.

mom says i am so good at making something out of nothing

and then flat out asks me if I am afraid of dying.

no,

i am afraid of living.

mom,

i am lonely.

i think i learnt it when dad left;

how to turn the anger into lonely,

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the lonely into busy.

so when i tell you i've been super busy lately,

i mean i've been falling asleep

watching sportscentre on the couch

to avoid confronting the empty side of my bed.

but my depression always drags me back to my bed,

until my bones are the forgotten fossils of a skeleton sunken city,

my mouth a bone yard of teeth broken from biting down on themselves.

the hollow auditorium of my chest swoons with echoes of a heartbeat,

but i am a careless tourist here;

i will never truly know everywhere i have been

mom still doesn't understand.

mom,

can't you see?

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neither do i.