

My Mother's Teeth—died twice, once in 1965, all pulled out from gum disease. Once again on August 3, 2015. The fake teeth sit in a box in the garage. When she died, I touched them, smelled them, thought I heard a whimper. I shoved the teeth into my mouth. But having two sets of teeth only made me hungrier. When my mother died, I saw myself in the mirror, her words around my mouth like powder from a donut. Her last words were in English. She asked for a Sprite. I wonder whether her last thought was in Chinese. I wonder what her last thought was. I used to think that a dead person's words die with them. Now I know that they scatter, looking for meaning to attach to like a scent. My mother used to collect orange blossoms in a small shallow bowl. I pass the tree each spring. I always knew that grief was something I could smell. But I didn't know that it's not actually a noun but a verb. That it moves.

I tell my children  
that hope is like a blue skirt,  
it can twirl and twirl,  
that men like to open it,  
take it apart, and wound it.

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I tell my children  
that sometimes I too can hope,  
that sometimes nothing  
moves but my love for someone,  
and the light from the dead star.

Friendships—died June 24, 2009, once beloved but not consistently beloved. The mirror won the battle. I am now imprisoned in the mirror. All my selves spread out like a deck of cards. It's true, the grieving speak a different language. I am separated from my friends by gauze. I will drive myself to my own house for the party. I will make small talk with myself, spill a drink on myself. When it's over, I will drive myself back to my own house. My conversations with other parents about children pass me on the way up the staircase and repeat on the way down. Before my mother's death, I sat anywhere. Now I look for the image of the empty chair near the image of the empty table. An image is a kind of distance. An image of me sits down. Depression is a glove over the heart. Depression is an image of a glove over the image of a heart.

Gait—my father's gait died on March 14, 2011. Once erect, light, flat-footed. Magnificent. Now, his gait shuffles like sandpaper. Once my father erected a basketball net, mounted it onto a wooden pole from the lumberyard to save money. With each shot, the pole moved a little, invisible to the eye, until I had to shoot from the side of the driveway. Now I avoid semicolons. I look for statues whose eyes don't move with me. The kind of people who stand in place and lights can be strung on. The problem is, my father's brain won't stop walking, and my dead mother is everywhere.

Logic—my father's logic died on June 24, 2009 in bright daylight. Murdered in the afternoon. I hung up Missing Person posters of myself and listened for the sound of a tree falling. The sound of the wind through trees is called *psithurism*. There's no word for the translator of wind. If the wind are words, the trees are exclamation points. The spears of moonlight, question marks. My father doesn't realize his words always end in prepositions. *I have a problem with [the moon], there is a problem between [the moon and me], the problem is on [the moon]*. What if he can no longer find what is being modified, in the way snow would fall forever if there were no lip to die on.

Optimism—died on August 3, 2015, a slow death into a pavement. At what point does a raindrop accept its falling? The moment the cloud begins to buckle under it or the moment the ground pierces it and breaks its shape? In December, my mother had her helper prepare a Chinese hotpot feast. My mother said it would probably be her last Christmas. I laughed at her. She yelled at my father all night. I put a fish ball in my mouth. My optimism covered the whole ball as if the fish had never died, had never been gutted and rolled into a humiliating shape. To acknowledge death is to acknowledge that we must take another shape.

Ambition—died on August 3, 2015, a sudden death. I buried ambition in the forest, next to distress. They used to take walks together until ambition pushed distress off the embankment. Now, they put a bracelet around my father's ankle. The alarm rings when he gets too close to the door. His ambitious nature makes him walk to the door a lot. When the alarm rings, he gets distressed. He remembers that he wants to find my house. He thinks he can find my house. His fingerprints have long vanished from my house. Some criminals put their fingers on electric coils of a stove to erase their fingerprints. But it only makes them easier to find. They found my father in the middle of the road last month, still like a bulbless lamp, unable to recall its function, confused like the moon. At the zoo, a great bald eagle sits in a small cage because of a missing wing. Its remaining wing is grief. Above the eagle, a bird flying is the eagle's memory and its prey, the future.

Chair—my mother’s green chair died on August 3, 2015. We arrange chairs in rows facing the same direction to represent reverence. In a circle to represent sharing. Stacked to represent completion. Hanging from the ceiling to represent art. In front of a desk to represent work. Before my mother died, I routed all her mail to my house. Her catalogues still come every day. I imagine her sitting in her chair flipping through them for more shirts that look the same. I understand now, only the living change clothes. Last week, I took my father pants-shopping. I heard him quarreling with the pants. He came out of the dressing room with his pants on backwards. Two pockets facing forward, like my mother’s eyes mocking me, as if to say, *I told you so*. He was angry, pointing and cursing at the *chairs* that no longer fit. I entered the men’s dressing room and picked up all the pants on the floor because one of them had to be my missing father.