

Lie to Oneself,

to Mom:

I heard from Father¹ that in order for you two to adopt me, you lied on your physical. You told them you were healthy, that your body hadn't been aged exponentially by the chemo.

I hope that the lie you gave to have me, which gave me life, did not make you feel badly.

I hope it felt like warmth.

That even as the light left your body, you felt solace knowing that your light moved form.

That even if you could not hold me as you wanted, your lie held me.

It felt like warmth.

Protection.

Home.

And to lie to another is to lie to oneself, even if just for a moment.

And I am a product of your faith—a life transferred. Your light transformed into my own—an image of a shadow behind me, outlined by the sun.

I remember that house in San Carlos.

In the back garden, I used to put rocks in my mouth. I would swirl them around, let them softly clack against my growing teeth. I remember Father laughing as he took them out with his fingers. Soft chuckles and chastising.

“Rhys, what’s with you and rocks?”

I was just copying Didi. I remember he would try and eat crayons from right out the box, would keep them from me. So I would wander off to the back garden where there were little salamanders and rocks. I’d hold the rocks in my grubby hands. I liked how warm they were.

¹ This is how I call him. Someone else’s dad. My father.

Mom,

Were you there?

Watching your son put pebbles into his mouth, because he liked how salty they were?

My hands warm and chalky.

Would you know if I was lying to you?

And to lie to another is to lie to oneself, even if just for a moment.

And I remember Grandpa Andy, your father, pushing Didi and me in these plastic kiddy cars down the sidewalk of our street.

When I tell this story, I lie.

I say: I could see him smiling as he pushed us. But all I remember was not looking back. I could hear him just fine, his laugh, could hear his smile— his desire to save us— and yet, I was captivated by the street ahead. The crossing from one sidewalk to another: the pause and then the surge, the bump down and then up, and in front of us: an entire world.

I remember the light of the sidewalk, and how it continued. I remember nothing else.

Mom,

Father recently showed me your old wallet. He had gotten it from a box downstairs that holds many remembrances, so many that when he placed it down in the corner of the dining room where I sat, I didn't know whether he was setting it down for me or for him.

And to lie to another is to lie to oneself, even if just for a moment.

Mom, I combed through everything in your wallet and pieced together parts of you: doctor's notes, cancer research business cards, two-thirds filled out grocery coupons, old receipts where I could see my brothers and me—our hungry little mouths. Big smiles and children's snacks.

I've never seen receipts so old the text had worn off. They were blank, white or tinged. I stared at them. I was looking for anything. I lied to myself thinking I could see you. I saw blank paper and a matte reflection.

So, talk to me of blankness. Talk to me of those receipts, of how I turned them over and over under the lamp, how the light rotated along the edges, how it reminded me of a divine revolution or the act of reinventing a world. Tell me: if my mind is blank when I think of the color of your eyes, can I still love you?

And my mind is blank.

And to lie to another is to lie to oneself, even if just for a moment.

When I wake, and the world comes from dark into focus, into light, is it you that guides me there? Like the unveiling of an opaque white silk over my eyes, your hand lifts, and places itself on the small of my back to push me forward. Out of night, into waking.

But I can't see you. So, let me dream instead.

Let me reinvent a world,
imagine a warm garden, hear you
laughing,
chuckling,
chastising,
smiling,
and
I won't look back.

Even
if I know you're looking. With your hazel, blue, green, brown eyes.

Even
if I want nothing more than to remember your face.

Even
as I lie here.