

No title needed for such moments in life.

The walls look at me in shame. Its neon pink and royal blue colors try to hide their feelings, but I know them all too well. They're humiliated by my lack of thought. I haven't had one in days, and now this paper is withering, rotting in my pale hands. The pen has lost all of its ink and the walls are now laughing. Despite the color's name—*Wild Fire* was the paint bucket I chose at Home Depot—I have never seen this color in fire. Maybe I have never seen wild fires. Maybe if I did I could write about them. A masterpiece of unyielding words and expression, a metaphor for my life. But I am not wild, and neither is my life. And I don't play with fire, my mum never let me.

I see what my problem is: I have nothing to say. But how could that be? I've never been lost for words. But in this time and place, my brain has overflowed into a nothing of poetry. The something of poetry is what I aspire to, but never quite reach. The search for it has proven to be demeaning. I see writers who at my age published anthologies. I see writers who at my age became voices of their generations. I see writers who sung and danced and made love to poetry. I see Philip Larkin.

Must I be depressed to be a poet? Must I bleed words of past indiscretions and familial pain on paper? Philip Larkin did. And he is considered one of the great post-modern writers. I can't do it and I want to be one of the great post-modern writers. Sure, I've had pain, tragedy and strife. But I never had a Nazi for a father. Mine just died before I ever had the chance to know him. I've never had my heart broken. I just cheated on my boyfriend four days ago. I don't feel any affection for jazz. I tried listening to Louis Armstrong and couldn't get past his coarse voice. Will I ever be a poet then?

Philip and I met once in a dream. We had tea, even though I don't like tea, and talked about words. He said, "I'd like to think that people in pubs would talk about my

poems.” But they don’t. Kids in classrooms do, as they recite their own versions of angst-ridden “This Be the Verse.” Parents do fuck you up. *They may not mean to, but they do. They fill you with the faults they had and add some extra, just for you*¹. My mum did this, as I’m sure hers did it to her. Philip makes me want to stop having sex. The threat of child bearing is looming too vividly over my small head. *Why did I dream of you last night?*²

Philip, being British, had a rich tone of sarcasm and self loathing in his work. He was a *dark cartoon* in *dark spaces*³. I am a colorful cartoon in blank spaces. I want to be Philip. But I can’t. Did he accomplish all that he wanted? Does anyone, really? In the same lifetime, I want to read, write and love. But I think each one cancels the other one out. Philip tried, and died. He was stricken with cancer and passed away in 1985, a vague shadow of what he once was. His last book, *High Windows*, was not well received and many thought the Larkin of past years was long gone. I am in search of Philip. I think I lost him a year ago. I haven’t written a proper poem in months. I haven’t loved in weeks. Where are you, Philip? I thought I’d find you in England, among all the other *dark cartoons*. But instead, you tuck away in cobble-stoned back alleys and red phone booths and double-decker buses, never acknowledging my need for you. Come back.

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He was born in 1922 in Coventry, Warwickshire. His father, a Nazi sympathizer, and his mother, a Freudian mold of overly loving matriarchs. They introduced Philip to the works of Robert Bernard Shaw, Oscar Wilde, D.H. Lawrence, and others. Something good to be gained from a fascist father. Although he criticized his father for his beliefs,

¹ This Be The Verse

² Why did I dream of you last night?

³ Far Out

Philip in turn harbored deeply conservative views of his own regarding the working class, labor unions, minorities and liberals. I wonder if he would hate me for being a spik. Or for being a leftist. Or both. I feel as if he anticipated his pre-disposed hatred toward liberal notions in his poem "Ignorance." *For our flesh surrounds us with its own decisions*⁴.

Upon being admitted to St. John's College, Oxford, he left his family and embarked on a quest for his writerly voice. In 1945, he published his first book, *The North Ship*, and I hate him for it. This means that in order to emulate my beloved Philip, I must publish a book in two years. I don't even have a dozen or so poems in my arsenal that would be considered worthy of publishing. I don't even have a title. Philip's titles seem effortless. *The Less Deceived*. *The Whitsun Weddings*. Mine are contrived. *Wild Fires*. I feel like a child when I write. I don't think Philip was ever a child.

He had Oxford, and I have Syracuse, New York. Oxford is a mecca for creativity. Syracuse is a snow-laced hole close to Canada. Philip spoke of *deadened air*⁵, but he never felt it whipping through his hair, drying his fair skin, or blowing up his skirt. He never felt Syracuse air. I have. *The deadened air* chaps my lips and suppresses my thoughts.

Philip was linked to a literary group at the time that opposed traditional, romantic styles of writing. "The Movement," as it was called, included British writers such as Kingsley Amis, Robert Conquest, and Elizabeth Jennings, all good friends of Philip. I am part of no movement. Writers don't move in Syracuse, they stand. They halt. This is yet another demeaning aspect of my search for Philip.

⁴ Ignorance

⁵ Ambulances

We do have some things in common. Philip was a consummate bachelor his entire life. He said, "Marriage is a marvelous thing...for other people." But it was his homosexual experiences that reinforced his lust for the opposite sex. I kissed a girl once. Not just any girl. My friend, Karla. We were drunk, I was lonely and she was beautiful. But I didn't like it. I think it has something to do with the fact that I don't enjoy women. I don't enjoy their presence most of the time. It was a good kiss. Soft, familiar, even beautifully aggressive at one point. Reminded me of Philip's poems. His words salt and sweeten my tongue simultaneously. They're abrasive and cruel, and delicate and ethereal. *In everyone there sleeps a sense of life lived according to love*⁶. I wish this sense would awaken in me soon.

He discovered pornography late in life, and was not ashamed to discuss it. After his male encounters, he became consumed with sex and would purchase large amounts of porn regularly. Porn makes me uneasy. I don't like how I feel when I watch it. Not because it's indecent, but because sex seems unappealing to me afterward. That scares me. On one of my first nights living in London, a group of friends and I decided to watch a humorous, pornographic version of *Alice in Wonderland*. It was a musical made in the 1970s. After some scenes of masturbation, close up shots of vaginas, and images of ejaculation, I pretended to be asleep so my friends wouldn't think I was immature. I hated how I felt. Made me think of how Philip's poetry makes me feel sometimes. Insignificant, turning me off to the very things they promote. Porn, sex. Philip, poetry. I can't do either of them at this point in my life.

Philip also hit a dry spell in his career, as do most writers. Writing careers last about as long as it takes for milk to sour. But Philip knew this, so he worked his entire

⁶ Faith Healing

life as a librarian. He worked at university libraries in Leicester, Belfast, and finally in Hull. Just north of London, you can find Hull, sleeping by the sea. Philip spent three decades here, writing, not writing, loving, not loving enough. And it was here where he died, where I suspect I shall die, by the sea. He wrote less as age increased and death neared. He remained *closed like confessionals*⁷. Critics attribute this to the death of his mother, who served as his muse throughout his life.

My mother called me the other day. I haven't seen her in four months. But we're used to it. We had a thirty-six minute conversation, the longest we've ever had without fighting. She makes me write, not because she promotes or encourages it. But because everything I don't say to her I have to say to someone. Even if they don't answer back. The day she dies is the day I stop writing. *My mother...holds up each summer day and shakes it out suspiciously*⁸.

But she's not dead. Why can't I write? Getting out would be good. Maybe the *deadened air* in grey London will revive me. I go to the Tate Modern to be moved. The Crack is there. Pollock is there. Picasso is there. But I'm not. As I examine a painting by Mark Rothko, I let out a long sigh of disgust. Modern art sucks. Philip was right. In his lifetime he criticized modern art frequently and would favor modern musical expressions like jazz instead. What are you trying to tell me, Mark Rothko, with your two blocks of color and line drawn through the middle? Why should I be moved by you and your shapes and your colors when you didn't even create them in the first place? Philip created phrases, combinations of words, of feelings. He lived his art. So fuck you, Mark Rothko.

I storm out of the exhibit, even more uninspired than when I came in. And then a wall stares at me. Another wall ashamed of me. But this one isn't just colors in fire. This

⁷ Ambulances

⁸ Mother, Summer, I

one has something to say. It says *Poetry and Dream: Surrealism and Beyond*. Around these letters, the names of artists scream out in cursive. Philip isn't one of them, but I want to be.

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I am leaving London soon. Does that mean I am to leave you too, Philip? In our dream together, he floated away, echoing and repeating the same phrase. *This brings closer what is left to come, and dulls to distance all we are*⁹.

Today I wrote my first poem in months. I doubt it's good. But it came from a place I know is sincere. And that's enough for me to think that I'm a writer. That's enough for me to think I'll make it as one for about as long as it takes for my milk to sour.

Musings on my father

i am looking to save someone's life
nothing major maybe just
grab them as
a bus charges toward them
in a huff or
read them a verse of Larkin when
they're contemplating the
bottom of the bridge or
donate a kidney or two to an
ailing child who never felt
the power of words
i don't have to know these people or
care about them
i just want to save them because
maybe when i save them
god will let me
go back in time and save Him from the
incoming car.

*by Paola Capó-García
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⁹ Ambulances

