

Shaquille is a shamrock. Fluffy, cramped, yellowing for a reason I do not yet know. Purchased Saint Patrick's Day eve from a clerk who teased me about the cost of its leafmade fortune. I am worried about Shaquille. (It is a worry that lately haunts my intimacies.) I worry that I love him the wrong way — that I am an ignorant and childish caretaker. That I have named him with a joke whose history wounds him where he can know it — that he can feel my lack like sunlight.

- I. Leaving town for California — where he would teach, and wed, and make new lives — he made me caretaker of a cactus. Ghosthold of his brother. I wonder if either of us suspected the failure to come, if either of us had an early sense of my depletion.
- II. Named in an instant, days after her arrival in my new home. Named for her grandeur — elegant monstrosity. Her obvious queendom. The name somehow containing a popular appellation for Sea Witch. Her name, instant, correct, unchanging still. Magnificent. Powerful in body and temporality in a way that insisted her sheddings be preserved. She — *Octavia*. She — poinsettia. She is the largest. May she continue to insist upon her being. May she instruct me in the taking and the making of space for lifetimes yet. Green leaves emerging now — sheep's clothing for the wolfing red to come.
- III. I set the English Ivy plant high up in our livingroom, gave its drapings room to be, and named it *Booker T*. Because this is hilarious. Because it is corrective. Because my rage takes many forms.
- IV. The Bulbosa Guatemala air plant lived nameless in my home for many weeks before I knew its name was *Toni*.
- V. We stood indoors nearby the croton and my human lover complained about its deficits. It was failing in his care. It was failing in his home. It was failing at his hand. My human lover did not know what it needed. My human lover was able to care well for many plants — an attractive quality. My human lover was not able to care for this plant. My human lover needed the croton's care to be discernible. And my human lover did no research yet framed his failure as the croton's. I scolded the human. I told him this flora would not abide such petulance. I told him he was the problem — that no beauty would reward this so-called care. We humans laughed in the truth and ease of this corrective moment. I brought the plant to my house and named it *Glissant*. I asked the Rastafarian selling crotons by my human lover's subway stop how to care for this being, he told me, and I made sure I understood. Glissant thrived in my home while I did. And when, in autumn, I began to fail myself anew, so too did Glissant suffer. A fungus flourished within us both. I survived the proliferation, but in my convalescence let deep neglects befall this croton.
- VI. Camilo named the gleaming, triumphant Nematanthus plant *Toussaint*. Andi named the glamorous dieffenbachia *Ashanti*. I am beginning to ask my new home to hold me, and it is able.
- VII. The Rasta asked me when I thought the real New Year began. My body knew the answer — springtime — said so and pleased us both.
- VIII. *Monae* is a money plant because that is hilarious.
- IX. Instagram reminds me that in these same weeks last year, alongside Monae, I named a large fern *Tyrone*, a light pink fittonia *Daphne*, a congruent pair of sages *bell* and *Nina*, and a gorgeous something or other *Sadie*. The black florist who sold them to me that afternoon feared the grasping of my fast unfurling desire for these beings and gently tried to discourage this unmoored loving. Indeed, by summer, only *Monae* and *Tyrone* had survived that afternoon's infatuation.

- X. Killing houseplants is so embarrassing. It is an instructive humiliation. In the chaos of my recent youth I twice murdered a farm of seedlings with the poison of neglect. For self. For ward. For life. The grief and shame I felt at failing all that flora brought them clear to life for me.
- XI. In the early 1980s, at the end of my family's pre-war apartment hallway, my mother installed an elegant bouquet of dying eucalyptus that taught me without words how important structure, how crucial intent, how subtle death, how knowing she.
- XII. When they separated, my Mom and I moved to an apartment near DUMBO where I learned the name *variegated philodendron* (my first favorite) and where a fern grew on the bathroom window ledge, dropping its dead leaves into the shower and bathtub — a gesture of wilderness I reviled and came to learn my mother didn't — where I began to understand in dim flickers who she was.
- XIII. Some years later in the next home, my mother wondered aloud where the massive tree trunk displayed at Bowling Green had gone. I casually offered my assumption that it had gone to a sculptor for carving, and she gasped in horror. I was frightened to see how inadvertently I'd hurt her, and I was delighted to encounter the details of her tree love. Two decades later, it is my favorite moment of getting to know her.
- XIV. **Chiwetel** is the London Plane tree branch thriving hydroponic, in my bedroom, at the window, and named for the English actor from Forest Gate London. Because that is hilarious.
- XV. I sleep on 100% cotton bedsheets printed in pinks and browns and purple with exuberantly illustrated impressions of unknown flowers, flat and fitted discovered among my aunt and grandmother's belongings. Flat beneath me nightly. Fitted now the dress I made and slipped into last summer before flinging myself bikeward toward the ocean, toward the edge, toward Fort Tilden, landing instead at Riis — the beach of my mother's childhood. Riis beach where a small black butterfly would swoop up under my new dress and bustle about at the button of my sex as I stood beside my bicycle stunned and honored and newly named **Florxa** before wading alone into hypnotic waves so frightening and so lush with power I felt my real life beginning.
- XVI. Newly homeless and running a fever of 104.5° I lay on the futon in my lover's guestroom wailing beside him, so frightened, so abject, and so tenderly cared for that I remembered I'd left **Monae**, **Glissant**, and **Tyrone** alone together in the dark of my new storage unit and understood with a ghastly wrenching how alive these things I delighted in, how terrifying love, how real life, and how tenuous. The seedling of a New self had begun breaking through the earth of Old — toward my heartbreaking mother, toward my baffling father, toward the overwhelming and essential sunlight of love.
- XVII. I am Googling *magenta* and then *fuchsia* because linguistic precision is responsible and erotic when I learn that fuchsia is not only the name of a color, but also the name of the flowering plant I saw last year in a West Village hardware store on the way to or from psychoanalysis and yesterday in Prospect Heights. Now I know that Fuchsia is the name of the flowering plant with petals so elaborately whimsical, regarding them feels like being on some sort of mushroom-mescaline. This insane floral genital too alarming to even wonder yet what it is called — for its being is too tremendous to digest at first — this floral genital is named a sound I've know since the age of Crayola and Mr. Sketch, but as a color this sound is the name of a purple. And then some dismay about why I ever thought fuchsia was something like magenta. And then the realization that the confusion is because this maniac flower's petaling comprises both colors. And then thoughts of veronica, a sound well-known as name to give 20th century women. A sound lesser known as the name of that spindly micropetal-festooned tuberous

flower. Google Image made me regard well over 200 women before it would show me a floral veronica. And then the day I wore rose oil perfume to a session and the analyst insisted my mother Roselle was in the room despite my objections. Then dizzily off elsewhere smiling at the magic of naming and looking and memory and this heaven of a planet.

- XVIII. **Florxa Gens** is a witch so radiant you do not realize she is one until you begin to feel gardens sprouting in your soul.
- XIX. We barely knew one another then, but when the vegetable farmer learned that I also love plants, I recall he regarded me anew and with a voice of the familiar said “That makes sense,” filling my heart with the sweetness of strange secret praise and the early twinkles of something old and warm and important.
- XX. The unnamed white man’s footprint is dead, so too some unlucky bamboo. **Chiwetel**’s long gone, and Shaquille is close to the brink. Care is not a game.
- XXI. In the shower I scrub Thursday, Friday, and Saturday from my flesh, recalling that punctuality protects the Queen’s peace, while creosote from Camilo’s desert home fills the air.
- XXII. I love the person beside me and am loathe to say it plain buoyed as we are again tonight alongside one another in these fogs of floral ash and oil.
- XXIII. **Shaquille** died weeks ago. Today I came home from the flowershop with marigolds skewered on bamboo — casual goblin.
- XXIV. A late-summer depression killed Octavia & Daphne Deuxieme.
- XXV. A gorgeous branch fell off its tree in yesterday’s rain and made itself known to me as I walked through the streets with Solange on repeat thinking endlessly of you and of floral offerings. I’ve brought it home to root and named it **Solange Carolyn Bush**. I am so angry over how you were taken from this world, so sick when I think how terrified you must have been, and so thankful to know how cool and smart and tender and funny and honest and weird and fierce and loving and elegant and kind you were while you were here with us. May freedom and garlic and honey and Lambrusco forever bring you to my mind. May I remain as soft and free as I please on this nightmare planet. May its infinite beauties ever endeavor to outpace its proliferating horrors. We love you so.
- XXVI. Though I named you clumsily in grief, you called out to me a chicer and thus, more fitting name. **Coco Solange**, and then as your memorial branch showed death upon it you called out again — *Now plant my seeds*.
- XXVII. It is February in the Americas, and I am looking at an image of a lynched black female not yet a mother and I am quietly telling the public record how amazed I am that black people are able to talk to white ones. Nearly a moon later I am singing *green, pink, black*; chanting *We are gardeners, we are gardeners*; knowing enslavement did not come with instruction; not caring if I am descended from kings and queens. Exalting in this ancestry of farmers.
- XXVIII. It is morning, two hours after the end of the cruelest holiday. **Flower, Hortense, LeVar,**
- XXIX. It is now Spring in the eastern hemisphere where I have been alive for thirteen thousand seven-hundred and eighty-three days, though in too many of them I felt nearly dead though walking working and

smiling out of necessity. **Flower, Roy, Hortense, Toni, Minaj, LeVar**, and other unnamed floral beings are dead in the wake of a depression I could not protect myself from that came on this fall as many of my species began to confront the sexual violence and existential neglect we have allowed to hurt those who carry our young for millenia.

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