Over the Rainbow

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

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Constance Joly

Over the Rainbow

Novel

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To my mother

All sorrows can be borne if you put them into a story.

Karen Blixen

You can’t catch death.

Ianthe Brautigan

1. All stories start with the departure of a soul

She had been my close friend when I was sixteen, we graduated together, we loved the same boy, we fought, we made up, we grew apart, until we completely lost touch with each other.

I knew that she was living alone, she was an humanitarian aid worker and I told her about the birth of my baby girl a few days before she decided to come and visit me. I hadn't seen her in ten years. I was freaked out like a novice. I sprayed scents of orange blossom in the room, arranged a cushion, and tried different smiles in front of the mirror. The baby was asleep, I regularly went to check her fluffy blond hair, I found her insanely beautiful, I was proud. Proud and bubbling with excitement.

The doorbell rang. My heart looped and I went to open the door. As soon as I saw her, I remembered the mud of the slipstream left in our friendship. I remembered that Justine wasn't the kind of "nice" type, and that she had always strongly dominated me. It came back to me that our rolls in the grass were greeted by her sarcasm, the ciggies I smoked were too expensive for her style, she thought I was too smiley, too skinny, too tall.

I saw it all over again in the blink of an eye, as her stern blue look crossed mine at the door. And I knew that this visit would be a mistake. I knew it instinctively, as I dedicated my famous smile to her and she was entering the apartment where my tiny baby had just woken up with heartbreaking sobs. She judged my daughter too spoiled, my apartment too posh, and while her index finger was touching my row of books, she laughed looking at the only lightly shameful one I had.

When I finally walked her to the door, Justine asked me about my father. I was surprised at the beginning, then I thought it was a joke, one of her dirty teen jokes, and I was almost relieved to find her sense of humor again, but to my horror, she continued. But, of course, how silly of her, he was dead. "It was Hi-Five, wasn’t it?" I had to nod. She added, calling the elevator, "Yes, that's right, I remember: he's one of the old gays who died first." The elevator stopped, and Justine went in throwing me one of her famous "Bye!". As I closed the door, I realized that the baby had stopped crying. And that I was shaking.

She had forgotten your death. It can happen, of course, I told her five years ago, we had not seen each other since. I could understand. I could forgive her for that. But she called you an "old gay", she mentioned your illness, AIDS, without even giving it its real name. This secret, sinful, shameful disease that you never talked about until the end. And these words were shivering in my brain: "old homo", "the Hi-Five". What you had to endure, to live your homosexuality. What you had suffered, to die. The silence that had sewn all this. Your life on the edge, your life in the background. And suddenly, the crash of these words that pretend to summarize you. Justine had settled your case in two formulas. The shame and sorrow that had ravaged me by closing the door on her, twenty years ago today, have turned into necessity. That of going back to the course of your life.

2. Super 8

I had been living with your memory for a long time now, like a dull rumor, a wind tunnel, an interference that we tend to forget with time. I managed to live with this, and my memory was now opening a box where the scenes of our past were piled up. Those twenty-two years I shared with you. A box of rush, quite small (it feels like I don’t have too many memories), filled with scenes from different stages: trips, vacations, weekends; a period in Nice, a period in Paris; and then tight framing, your hands, your eyes, a specific detail of one of your successive apartments: a painting, your balconies, your armchair. It was enough for me, I think, I was picking in there, I was stirring some bits, I was taking one to get a closer look, here, Yugoslavia, here, when I was two years old, I was replaying a small act, then I was closing the box.

I also have a few photo albums and a film. Thick, cream-colored albums with upholstered covers, with crystal dividers inherited from your mother. Lucie and you, at the École Normale. You, as a teenager, in short pants, in Masséna square. You, during your overweight period and sideburns. You, as a young father. The Luxembourg Gardens, the shimmering pools, the statues providing a perch for pigeons. Me, a boater hat on my head, knitted overalls expanded by diapers. Pastel colors, tea pink or almond green dresses for mum, beige and waterproof jeans for you, floral print skirts, grandma’s lacquered hair style, our golden shoulders in front of the vines, my red clogs, the candy floss hidden for the photo, my face powdered with pink sugar, my dazed look. Two or three decades of happiness laid out. Three large fading books, kept with my DVDs.

The Super 8 film takes place in Marco-Polo Square behind the Closerie des Lilas, which is located in front of the building where we lived. The images are slightly shaken, followed by the purring of the camera. They are too bright, overexposed, ribbed with undesirable black lines. The shot framing looks amateur, with faded colors and no sign of nature. Each garment, each haircut, each scenery piece is dated. The movement, speechless, is at the same time funny and heartbreaking. The figures are thin, the smiles embarrassed. All this appears in the image: the youth and the joy, the embarrassment and the sadness in the eyes. Spoken words, silent laughter. Faces and mouths bloom in forgotten flowers. The image flickers. Lucie is in her heydays of her 30s, cascading black hair, flared jeans and a cape under which I keep disappearing. It looks like a bullfighter's game, I'm the tiny curly bull, my mother waves her cape, I drown in it, and as soon as the cape moves away, I crawl with all the strength of my calves. My mother is my lighthouse, my promised land, I only have eyes for her, and I stretch out languishing arms to her. You wave at me, awkwardly, come, come, I can almost read your lips, but I avoid you, your body is an obstacle, I want my mother. You try to grab my hand, and I steal it from you. Your gesture, then, breaks my heart today: you raise a resigned arm, never mind, and you look at us. Today, I stare at this same hand that I am now using to write, the one that wanted to escape you. This hand is trying to grab you but only catches emptiness.

There is that moment when you leave us at our loving bullfight in the background of the image, and you step towards the camera: your white jeans, your shirt with rolled up sleeves, you move forward with your big step, your huge legs, you get closer, your belt, then your chest, your face close-up, you smile more and more widely as you get near the filmmaker, your face takes the entire frame now, your lips, you talk (but what do you say?), you laugh, you laugh so much.

Maybe that’s when the black swallows that smile, when you disappear. I have seen this film dozens of times, but that day, the black that replaces you, follows me. Your face shivers under my eyelids.

As I am putting away the Super 8 movie, I know it's time to sort through my memories to write your story. A story of which I would be the editor. The liar. The one that fills the gaps, synchronizes gestures and words. The one that replays the past.

I know the language of the missing ones. You taught me.

Then it's pitch black.

3. The wax figure

The city of Nice flows through your veins like bad blood. You left behind the eldest, grumpy and responsible; the teenager who collected the awards of excellence, the silent and puffy young groom, and so many other truncated versions of yourself. All these Jacques no longer look like you. You got married there in front of The Cathedral of Sainte-Réparate one day in February 1966. In the rare photos of the ceremony, you look like a wax figure, with a petrified smile, dangling arms, suit too tight. Lucie, ungrateful bun, stretched lips, looking like a meringue in her heavy satin dress and her frozen bouquet.

You talked as little as possible that year. What would a wax figure say? You put up a front, you played the game, you gave your best, you knew the rules by heart. Until the moment you couldn't pretend anymore. You knew how to dupe. But you wanted to live. I am able to imagine that, this urgency. Then you left. You left this sun, the overexposure, Nice and its bitter orange trees. You left with your wife, your wife so beautiful but soon so sad.

From Nice, all you have left is the dizzying smell of the fig trees of the Reserve, the lemons and the flowering thyme; the pink and Venetian tones of the facades, the ice cream parlor of Place Garibaldi, the old port and its antique shops. You put Nice in jars, candied fruits, lemon marmalade, poivrade artichokes and Olivettes, and you wrapped it all in large loads of blooming mimosas.

In Paris, your speech would return. The envy. 1968 would blow your lethargy, it would awaken your viscous blood. You would be young teachers, you would demonstrate in the street, you would have committed friends, soon famous. You would go to the film library, to the theatre, to the suburbs, to Nanterre, to Bobigny; you would write for Les Temps Modernes, Lucie would connect me with Simone de Beauvoir on the phone, she would translate Primo Levi, you would discover together Chéreau, Dario Fo, Vitez, Planchon; you would have dance parties, improvised picnics, you would be the leader of your little troupe, and Lucie would be cheerful.

You had believed so strongly in the fiction of your love that there again, you made an impression. You were talking now, you were even shouting in the street with others. You were talking, you were so funny, you were making your famous friends laugh.

You were talking, yes, but you weren't listening to yourself.

At night, you always had the same dream. The scenery sometimes changed: a bridge, a beach, an alley, but the scenario was almost always the same. In these dreams, you were walking, a felt hat was hiding your face, a circle of light was following you and you had to flee. At some point, coming out of the shadows, a man walked towards you. He lifted your hat with one finger. The circle of light would catch up with you , and it was a sudden glare. He looked like Robert Redford and smiled at you. His hands ran through your body, and then he slowly knelt down. The sky was spinning, the scenery faded while the universe seemed to blend in and concentrate in a ball of fire in your belly.

You were waking up, your stomach was sticky, your heart panicked. Lucie was asleep, her topaz ring throwing a pale fire into the darkness.

4. The poppy

I heard that you came to the maternity ward with a lily of the Valley sprig in March. A miraculous flower, which I still wonder where you found it. It seems that even before you took me in your arms, you had counted all my fingers. You were reassured – that's good, there were ten – you had succeeded, you were the father of a normal child, you with a fraudulent husband identity, as an impostor father. You, who probably guessed that the drive towards the body of your wife, the one that your friends envied, was not spontaneous. You liked Lucie, of course, you loved her as you love a friend, a beautiful and luscious friend, and she adored you.

A slightly built young couple, two brown and laughing vines, their life ahead of them. Together, you shared everything: the movie screenings in the Latin Quarter, the Italian literature you both taught, your love for the beach and for crazy parties where you went dressed up, your walks in the small paved courtyards of Paris, the demonstrations against the Vietnam War, the paintings found at the antique dealers; you shared everything, and also your bed, with heavy embroidered sheets.

There was this summer 68. The one that succeeded the burning of the street. You are happy and exhausted, corrected copies made, Paris was far too hot, the boulevard du Montparnasse deserted, the pollen suspended in the air. What about going somewhere, what about the countryside? Here you are cycling through the fields, poppies in your hand, looking for a shade on the patios. Finding it in an abbey with austere bedrooms. Outside, the branches sway gently, with the weight of the blooming flowers. Lucie's golden body, her bright smile, the poppy pricked in her hair, and your sudden impulse. The clematis climb to the windows, the wind brings the dry smell of a stone, maybe a bell in the evening vibration. I was conceived in this theater of shadows.

5. Silence

You hated your brother early on. Your little blond brother with girly curls, as graceful as you are clumsy, as mocking as you are academic. You share the same room in Pastorelli street, in Nice. A cramped room, two beds leaning against the walls, a window in the middle where the sun never comes through.

The only thing you have in common is a muffled detestation. Your mother's high-pitched voice and her overly red lips. The bent spine of your father, who comes back from the garage with his hands still sticky with engine oil and sludge. Caring and dominated. Sunday walks in Saint-Jean-Cap-Ferrat, short panties, disciplined curls and masking smiles. Look at little Bertrand, the golden angel, and Jacques, the eldest, his grumpy look. They are the other side of the same coin, they are so similar. Under the table of the restaurant on Sunday, the kicks between brothers, the bruises on the shins, the contained grimaces.

Without talking to each other, you searched for the way out through books. You learned by heart entire pages of the dictionary, read and read again Hugo, Stendhal, Henri de Régnier, everything lying around. Your fights are violent, your hatred fierce. You pick up all the awards of excellence, Bertrand too, and you shudder with rage.

Because deep down, you know. You know that Bertrand is the one who will manage to unravel his image from the family embroidery, to erase his blonde curls from the pictures. You feel that he is free, and that he will go out of the frame. You know that you will strive even harder, but remain a prisoner.

Bertrand and you hate each other because you are the same.

Two boys who know they are homosexuals and who keep it silent.

What you share cannot be said.

6. The Damned

Your brother left Nice before entering adulthood following the incident.

Bertrand is eighteen years old when one afternoon your mother again suggests another walk in Saint-Jean. Your brother refuses, you reluctantly accept, you go with your parents, leaving Bertrand with his Latin dictionary. Because she doesn’t feel good, she cannot continue the walk, and the three of you get home earlier than expected. Instantly, you understand that something has happened. You understand that this thing happened. Your mother senses something too, with a restless step she slams her heels on the floor towards your room.

She opens the door, represses a cry, wobbles by the door, your father helps his wife who is nearly fainting. You understood before them. Without seeing anything, without hearing anything of the confused words coming out of your mother's mouth, you know. A sour resentment goes up your throat while she is now crying, suffocating, knocked down on the blue velvet chair. Bertrand is in bed, with a negro. Here is the exact sentence, the one that will go around then in a whisper in the family: Bertrand, 18 years old. In bed. With a negro. Bertrand, three times guilty. Minor, queer, and a social upstart.

At the request of your parents, you sat on the improvised family council in a hurry, gathering your grandparents, parents, brother and yourself around the living room table. Your embarrassment, maybe your secret joy too. What punishment for this degenerate brother? This brother who lives the agitated life, the one you repress underneath your shadow? So, Jacques, we are listening? You clear your throat, the clear gaze of your brother burns your eyes. The flames of shame are reaching your ears, they are bright red. The family is hanging on your word as the elder. You sit in the center of the circle; you propose a boarding school in an incomprehensive mumbling that no one understand so you have to repeat it. Boarding School! throwing your words with burning cheeks.

His answer feels like a fist that he crushes on your face: whatever, but I am not more gay than him. Your brother's laughter, bitter. The discussion rises, your grandfather imposes to Bertrand to look down. You are the one who lowers them. More gay than him. You know that these words will never fade in your mind, the venom has already poisoned it. The grandfather whips: what a shame! A man! Besides a negro! Not so loud, begs your mother, please, the neighbors.

Let him be damned.

You choose the exile.

So, your brother left the family home. First, he went to Paris, to a distant aunt, then, after failing the oral examination of Ecole Normale, he went to the other side of the world to teach philosophy in the French island high school of Pointe‐à-Pitre, then of Basse-Terre. As long as you were alive, he needed those thousands of miles between you. Today, Bertrand has left the exotic lands in which he fled in his twenties to live again on the heights of Nice, now than no one lives there. He is back to the land he always loved, has planted olive trees, mimosas and persimmons. In a corner of his garden, he grows orchids, which remind him of his years spent in the islands.

7. Faster than the sun

You and Bertrand didn’t see each other much as adults. I saw this mysterious uncle once or twice, when I was little, when you would go to visit him in the two-bedroom apartment he shared with Cocotte, a rude parrot that flies around my hair squeaking "Hello, slut!" to welcome me. When he saw my fear, Bertrand burst into laughter, but all he needs is to whistle for the bird to stop his rudeness and come to rest on his head. I like my uncle, this strange emperor, wearing a parrot on his head; the sweet smell of his cigarettes, his rare words, the kindness he cannot hide with his grumpy look.

Four or five years ago, one summer, I came over to settle family matters, and I called him. He invited me to come and spend the evening and night at his house, in his small village in the hinterland of Nice. It's been a while since I saw him. Cocotte is dead, Bertrand now lives with two big dogs he calls his “daughters”. His voice, veiled by nicotine, is however so similar to yours that I almost startle. He also looks a lot like you. His face and yours merge, but instead of your well-trimmed beard, his is reddened with tobacco. His humor is also similar to yours, in which he adds acidity. It is the unfiltered version of yourself.

In the big house cluttered with family furniture, I feel you are everywhere. On the walls, Bertrand has placed the paintings he bought after your death. In the smell of the rooms cluttered with antique furniture and plants; the same as in your home: a botanical fragrance, earthy, that reminds me of a pencil; in the vibrating air of forgotten operas, which only you and him seem to know.

Nowhere do I see the hatred you had for each other.

Bertrand takes me to a bedroom where I see again The Damned in Hell above my bed, the first painting he took from your house. The Damned who was already decorating my bedroom when I was only a child. Wherever I go, the unfortunate fallen with crazy eyes follows me. Since I was seven years old, the colossal snake he bites into an eternal fire has been watching over my dreams. My body is sweating but I decide to completely ignore it.

In the middle of the night, I wake up asphyxiated, my heart banging in my chest. The Damned rolls his reddened pupils to heaven. My breathing speeds up as my eyes land on every element of the shadows in the room. I feel trapped in the lair of a museum grimacing in your memory. Everywhere, your paintings, your carpets, your bedside tables; everywhere, that voice that belongs to you, that perfume that belongs to you. Your only brother. The one you rejected because he accepted his homosexuality before you. The one who probably led you to play your score of a good son, good husband, then good father. In the midst of the dying martyrs, I finally calm down. I get up twisted from my wet sheets, my head capped with crazy thoughts. The dawn unfolds behind the windows. The exile you endured lasted longer than Bertrand's. Before you reached the shores of your true existence, you made your brother lie, you locked your shameful and secret dreams: you had a daughter.

My affection is for this uncle to whom I indirectly owe life.

As the day lengthens large brushes of light on the walls and a jumble of birds rise from the trees, I wash my face. In the morning, the shadows disappear, and the joy of being alive runs through my veins faster than the sun.

8. Collapse

It's the summer, in Forte dei Marmi. You went with two other couples to a large stone farmhouse on the heights of the Tuscan countryside. You had no kids yet, you are in your thirties, suitcases full of books, swimsuits and ping-pong rackets. Each of you is working on a novel, essay or play. You are a sample of what the left-wing intelligentsia of the time can produce in the summer of '68. You are the glorious ones, so full of confidence in the future. While the Red Guards are fleeing on the roads in China, the Prague Spring is crushed by the military, an earthquake is killing fifteen thousand people in Iran, you shake embroidered tablecloths and set the table in the shade of fig trees. The summer is a painting by Cézanne, a wound oozing from the sun, a steaming violence. Every day, you prepare large picnic baskets to go to the beach, you crush the carpet of fragrant needles, with your flip-flops, crazy of sea and sun, to roast the octopuses you caught. Every evening, you fill your glasses with golden wine in the shade of the umbrella pines, and throughout the long curve of these days, you witness your inner collapse. In the photos, you are tanned, muscular, splendid, you are emptied of your substance, sucked into nothingness, your heart drumming.

There's something you don't want to see. Something that blazes in your dreams and leaves you calcined in the morning. There's something you don’t forget. Something that sticks to your palate but you don't know how to say it. Something that keeps talking to you, and you don't want to hear it. The tanned bodies of men, the arch of their eyelashes, their shoulders make you bend in your dreams. You can't be like your brother. More gay than him. Didn't you choose the most beautiful woman, the most educated, the "jackpot" as her mother whispered to you, knowing, while rolling "r" on your engagement day? What else do you need? Isn't your life enviable? Didn't you do everything right? You left Nice, the city of your "best enemies", as you call them. You live in Paris, a small apartment on the left bank, three rooms with exposed beams where you built a library with bricks and wooden planks. You own these things, dear to Perec: 1900 vases filled with bouquets of fresh peonies. Waxed tables, apricots in antique cups. Paperback editions of Pavese, Faulkner, Karen Blixen, Henry James. You work on desire and utopia in the work of Metastasis, you started your thesis, Lucie teaches at the Sorbonne, the future is a field full of promises. So? So, that's not enough. Everything is there, dancing and lively, and you dream of drowning, you dream of blood and ashes. You would like to say that, and everything else. To speak finally, to loosen the embrace of anguish. You look at your friends. Dominique, his long hair, his book Life of Beaumarchais, which he carries everywhere, even on the beach. You look at Marie-Claude, her kimonos, who will be playing at the beginning of the school year La Noce Chez les Petits-Bourgeois, you look at Marcel, who is working on his next novel, you look at Bruno, your brother-in-law, who goes every morning to climb hills by bike singing Verdi, and you can't imagine, even to them, your friends, even to them, the family of intellectuals that you have chosen for yourself, you cannot imagine to articulate a word. Yet, it would only take one word to preserve those you love from your contained fury, and for you to finally breath.

There are nights of anguish.

Every night in your room, you scan the whitewashed ceiling and wonder what the sky does with your infamous thoughts, the ones you imagine yourself going out to of this house, meet a ragazzo on the beach, walk with him to the cave, kiss his fleshy lips, and have sex with him. Your dreams are toxic fumes, which threaten to consume the pine forest. Every dawn, you wake up feeling that you are going to die while Lucia is asleep in her summer beauty sleep. One night, the anguish is so much that you turn the doorknob and walk in the darkness of the corridor. Staggering, you knock on Marcel's door. You must look ravaged, because he takes your hand to sit you in the kitchen, where he serves you a glass of cognac. Outside, the pine forest stirs with a hostile rustle, and your heart starts drumming again. You are shaking so much that you break your glass and cut your foot with a glass splinter. Marcel goes back and forth, wraps your wound, puts water on your face, and ends up giving you a sedative. He finally asks you what is happening to you. You are livid, he has never seen you like that. Your foot is painful, tears are flowing. Would you be able one day to talk about what terrifies you? You spit with sobs which makes it impossible to understand that you had a nightmare, your brother, Bertrand, the queer, always the same dream, your sentence is left open.

Marcel asks you gently, what are you trying to say, your brother is queer? What do you mean? With a forced laugh, yes, so what, don’t you know that Bertrand is homosexual? Marcel stares at you, no, he didn't know it, but if it's his choice, what's wrong with it? If it's his choice... You dare to continue, your voice would betray you. What choice is he talking about? You and Bertrand have no choice. You are like that. Insults are burning your throat but you drink in silence, you thank Marcel for his concern, reassure him, I am going to be ok now, then you limped to your bedroom, the look of your friend twisted in your back.

After that night, your loneliness has thickened like an extra layer on your skin. You throw jokes, play ping-pong games, open clams, uncork bottles and only get a break at sunset, watching your shadow merge with the ones of the cypress trees.

One morning, you plan an excursion to the island of Elba, to visit your friend Carlo. It is a beautiful day, your little hive is busy around the baskets, the sandwiches are wrapped in newspaper, the peaches cut in quarters in tea towels. When you are just about to get on the boat, Lucie is feeling sick, she looks gray with fatigue, nauseated. You suggest to postpone the excursion, to go to the beach instead, and you turn round. You close the blinds, settle your wife in the cool place, place a damp cloth on her forehead, and go to the post office to send a message to your Italian friend, to apologize for this missed appointment.

In the evening, you get a reply from Carlo, he is panicking and he is asking you if you and Lucie are really breaking up. You are stunned. Why is he asking you this? The friend reads the message you sent:

*Vita impossibile*. (Life impossible.)

*Lucie e malata.* (Lucie is sick.)

The slip of the tongue that makes you write "vita" ("life") instead of "gita" ("excursion") takes your breath away. Your body cannot fight what is obvious.

Back from this charred summer, you discover that Lucie is pregnant.

9. The yarn of words

You choose the name "Constance". Constancy is a virtue that you want in your life, to dig your path in this marriage, in this fiction. To last, to persevere, I have to carry the name and the weight. You will not persevere in your role as a husband, but you will as a father. You were a discreet, awkward, shy and wonderful father.

I feel like I am knitting big stitches while I am writing to get you out of the shadow. Between the knots of this yarn of words passes everything I do not know how to say, everything that I cannot invent, and what I know is part of life: the tight point of complex emotions, uncertainty stolen by the variety of facts, so much so that often I feel discouraged. But I promised myself to move forward to join you. Uncover your masks, bring down the successive fictions that you have built to keep your balance.

We are the product of a life full of secret holes, woven with dreams and denials. I have also fallen through the cracks of your lies.

I live, thanks to the story you wanted to tell to the world, which literally left you speechless. I live thanks to the fiction.

And I am here, now, trying to give you back the words.

10. Cotton candy

You never liked cotton candy. That pink obscenity that sticks to the fingers and teeth, that taste of nothing, that sparkle that disintegrates on the tongue. At the end, the only thing left, is a sticky wooden stem and a disgusting taste. Childhood is a mountain of sugar that eats our faces. In Luxembourg, you made sure not to go through the alley that takes you to the sweet shop. You hold my hand, a warm madeleine in the palm of yours, and we go towards the ponies. Under a soft blue sky, we walk towards the silent fountains, the ruined pools and the statues of beheaded queens. You watch your daughter trying to balance on the iron hoop fencing boarding the lawns, airplane arms and sparkling smile. You hold her with one finger, and look up at this new spring, of your five years old daughter. We walk in silence. I climb on the fountain, to throw myself into your arms. The sky shines with a metallic brightness, the leaves shiver and the wind rolls the dust of the aisles. One more jump, then it will be time to go home and take a bath. The large pool is full of overturned boats, and their tiny shipwrecks squeeze your heart in a strange way. While crossing the boulevard, the clouds suddenly break, we run under a spring rain stuck with the white flowers of the chestnut trees, you feel my warm body dripping with rain against you, and you wonder in what terrible chaos you will lead us, my mother and I.

11. Questions

Like all children, I hear mostly what you keep quiet.

Did you always know? Are you guilty? Is it better to stick to the edges of your existence? Can you continue to inhabit your ghost life? Can you do this to your parents? To your wife? To your daughter? To do this to live your life: do you have the right to do so?

And because this silence between us vibrates with these inarticulate questions, I keep asking you:

Do we start counting from zero? Do we still have time to think just a little when we die? Do we rot right away? Do worms eat us? How much of life is eternity? Why isn't my stuffed animal growing? Do people speak the same language as me all over the world? Do we think before we speak? Questions swirl in my mouth, as a six-year-old and burst like air bubbles. You answer me evasively. But I want to know: are we counting zero, yes or no? And because you laugh at me, I decide that I don't understand anything about numbers, and that I will have to find another arrangement with life. All I want, is to see a cemetery. It would be a vast and miserable area, a huge moor where all the dead of the world rest, interweaving their pale bones deep under the ground. I sincerely hope that they are still talking to each other. That they don't feel too lonely. Do the dead whisper? Do they have time for one last story? Just a few minutes?