In Arusha, Tanzania

We have only two seasons in our country: wet, and dry.

-David, Assistant Guide

Up here, the sun is fire. Arusha rubs his head, black bald hot to the touch. Into the shadows! He nudges us, 12 people into the shade of an 8-foot shrub. He plops onto a rock, fully exposed his brow dripping in his eyes drooping on his head dropping—Take my hat! Scott offers it by the brim, insisting, imploring; please, for like, protection. Arusha stares; I am used to sun. I can handle. He rises and pushes Scott back to the shade. You are not used. You need.

There comes a point where we stop counting. I've spoken billions of words, driven dozens of cars, eaten upwards of 400 burritos. But no matter how many times I climb Mt. Kilimanjaro, I think I will count. Arusha tells us maybe 100, maybe more, his pole pole steps kicking dust into my mouth. 33 years on the mountain and he's stooped, wrinkled, 65? I am 48, he says, the sun is poison.

Where are you from Arusha? He guffaws: Arusha! The town 19,341 feet below us, where we first saw Kili, where we can buy Pringles and popcorn and Kilimanjaro beers to shotgun on the summit. You've never left? His laughter cuts. Here, we do not leave.
Le 14 Juillet

On the neighbor's cobblestone wall next to my grandparents' front porch, we sit. The salty air is thick with smoke, visitors' beach bonfires suffocating the sky. Each smooth bigarnot shell cools my hand as I pick out the meat, the chewy miniature snails crunching as sand gets wedged between my teeth. My sister and I part the smoke and search for the sky. We look down at moving lips and pick out the words we know, forming life stories around them. We bask in the childish superiority that can only come from towering over adults, convince ourselves that they are the tourists, even though we are the ones unfamiliar with the country's tongue. I take a bite of the apperatif's last finger sandwich, salmon, cucumber, and cream cheese tingling my gums as the first explosion roars.

Yelps and jumps jolt the crowd like last night's lightning. We nearly tumble from our perch, startling each other with laughter. Everyone settles, and Oohs and Aaahs compete with the booms as brightness overtakes the ashy sky. I watch my own country's colors, bleu, blanche, et rouge shimmer above the walls of Old St. Malo.
On the Odor of Oranges

The outside is the Earth. Like it fell to the soil and sat for a while before you picked it up. The inside is citrus—of course, an orange. Smells like orange juice, smells like orange wedge. But when I stick my nail in and crack its shell, for just a moment, it's Grampa. It's his house in Minden with the little backyard and the 16 oranges on the tree. It's me making a face because orange is Dramamine and Dramamine is nausea, and it's Grampa putting one on my plate and splitting the peel so it spritzes my face. It's juice in his beard and the squint of his eye when he could no longer speak. It's Auntie Barb and Uncle Barry and Kelly the golden retriever, until I remove my finger. It's an orange, Grampa is gone, and I eat.
Dear Lovers of the World,

Please. Burn your flowers. Rip your cards. Feed your $40 dollar Ruby Tuesday's Filet Mignon to the dog, and go to the airport. Buy the two cheapest tickets that leave in the next hour, and spend a weekend in a rundown Bed and Breakfast in Montana. Keep your face as naked as your body. Run through sprinklers, if you happen to see some. Lie on a roof. Scream, and sing and sing. NO selfies. Photograph each other. Paint each other, if you have turmeric and blackberries. You know where she came from. But ask why she was there. Talk about how it hurts. Because it does hurt, it always does. Tell him about that time in sixth grade when Chris Abbinito told you not to wear short sleeves because your arms are too hairy. Whisper in a shopping mall. Locate office chairs — spin. Wear each other's socks. Have sex. Like, a lot of sex. Dream together, but don't talk about it. Eat an Angus bull's testicle. Drink, get drunk. Forget that it's Valentine's Day. Drive your rental car to the mountains. Get a flat tire. Miss your flight home. Ask the neighbors to feed the fish. Stay the night. Stay the year. And next February 14th, when you're wondering what to do, remind yourself that Saint Valentine was the patron saint of epilepsy and beekeeping. Perhaps a rave in a bee yard would be most fitting.
When My Mother Stopped Singing

*Raindrops on roses and whiskers on kittens.* My mom used to sing us to bed every night. Lights off, my sister on the top bunk and me on the bottom, she'd float between the levels and serenade us individually. She'd interrupt herself with affection—*Girls in white dresses with blue kiss-hug sashes*—sleep never let me hear the end of a song.

She stopped singing when we grew up, when we discovered our own music taste and she no longer tucked us in at night. I ask once if she had ever done any singing, like real singing, in front of people who weren't us. She tells me about chorus, singing so fully she forgot her voice. She tells me the realization, prying her eyes open to the other twelve-year-olds laughing and pointing, backing up sitting down, telling herself she would never sing again.

I think of her when I hear Simon and Garfunkle, ABBA, Barbara Streisand. She got us a bear to play us a tune when she couldn't, and today it hangs on the edge of my bed in the same home that held these songs. Sometimes I bump it with my foot and it starts, I curl up in my bottom bunk with my old Blankie and pretend the jingle is Mama's hum. And these, still, are a few of my favourite things.