The Myriad

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Love vb
To have great attachment to
And affection for.
To
Have
A passionate desire,
Longing
And feelings for.
To like or desire
Something
Very much.

Myriad n
Innumerable.
A large
Indefinite number.
The beginning

She wakes to the sound
Of the Bumblebee
Coming from the piano.
She sees his long fingers,
The colour of a fallen autumn leaf,
Dancing along
The white bones of the piano
Like a spider
Thrown into a fit.
She feels hot
And heavy
Like an insect caught in honey.
She cannot remember
How she got here.
Going home

The sky is still asleep
At five am.
It is grey and hazy,
Like a shadow
Blanketing the earth,
Waiting for the alarm
Of the sun.

You could do anything
At this hour

And no one would know.

Would that mean
You had done it?
Trees know
The death of another tree,
But no one
Ever asks them.
They just scream and scream
As birds make nests
In their limbs.
The unsecret

I hear her
Coming through the door.
She hasn’t taken her shoes off.
Hard hitting breaths
On the floorboards
Ring in my ears
With the sound
Of infidelity.
Lost

Ada

Gets scared
During thunderstorms,
Being alone at night.
It’s not the darkness that frightens her.
She doesn’t know
What she’ll do
If she can’t find
Her own reflection.
He came home late once
Found her sitting
On the front step,
Her hair stuck to her face
Like golden rain,
The sky burning her white
With lightning.
She followed him around
The house
For days afterwards,

Her eyes as big
As a spooked cat’s.
He could feel her watching him
With awe:
He wasn’t afraid
Of anything.
If he looked at her

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At the right time,
Before her eyes
Had time to change,
He saw in those green
The smallest slits
Of accusation.
Reason

You cannot woo
The sky.

Men can be swayed
With right angles,
Soft skin.

The sky cares
Nothing

For women.
Daylight

They sit at the table
Eating eggs,
Toast
And silence.
Usually
They read the newspaper together.
She reads faster than him,
She has more time to digest
Printed disasters.
But today he sits
At one end reading;
She at the other.
The bottom half
Of his face is covered
With black lines.
The scrape of a fork
Across a white plate
Is the only
Thing he says
All morning.
**Her sister**

Ruth

 Comes to see her.

She always knows when something

Is wrong with Ada.

Ruth is a lawyer,

Shrewd and sleek.

She has a nice house,

A fast car

And a killing smile.

She isn't afraid of the dark.

She’s afraid of her insides

Which are shrivelled and useless.

She threw out her Barbie dolls

When she found out.

It was like looking at miniatures

Of herself:

Feminine yet sexless.

Wholesome

Yet

Hole less.
Baron

At night Ruth whispers to herself

Baroness, baroness.

She falls asleep with her fingers
Clawing her stomach.

She comes around to see Ada,
Watches her as she pours them both tea
And drowns herself in the cup.

“You’re coming with me,” Ruth says.

It’s not a suggestion.

Ruth strides past the husband
Packs a toothbrush, pyjamas,

Dresses that would fit a ten-year old.

She packs her sister into the car,
And suddenly, she thinks of store mannequins.

Ada is so small and poised,
Skin pale and cool, like plastic.

Her arms out ready to receive
A handbag
Or a heart

That only a sister could give.
Ruth’s House

Ruth pours her sister wine
Orders takeaway,
The good kind.
She doesn’t say anything,
She just waits.
You can stand outside all night,
She thinks,
Banging a fork against a tin,
But a cat will never come
When called.

They drink wine until
Their teeth are red.
They put on their pyjamas,
Brush their teeth,
Laugh as they watch
Blood coloured froth
Drain down the sink.
Decision

Ada lays awake
In the spare room
Between sheets
Nicer
Than the ones at home.
She folds her hands
Across her stomach,
Wonders what Ruth will say
About having something
She doesn’t want.
Something Ruth
Would kill for.
She imagines Ruth’s slender hands
Around her small neck, pressing
Down
Hard.
She sits up in bed,
Drinks water from a glass.
She needs to make
A decision.
Gift

“Ruth,”
She says to the dark.
“I have something
To give to you.”

She cups out her hands
to Ruth,
tips them down.
Watches as
their content
falls
to
the
floor.
In twenty two weeks
It will be a boy.
Hospital

Time is not
Like a line,
Moving forward,
Looking back.

It is circular, it repeats,
It folds in
On itself.

Like a heart it pumps
Seconds, minutes, hours, days
Through veins on the wall,
And back again.
And again.

I have been here before,
I have lain
In sheets of cotton,
Wondering how I got here,
Wondering how
I will get home
Before time notices
I’m gone.
Shoes and Ceiling

The baby
Cries like all babies.
The nurse smiles
Her routine smile
Before walking out
In white shoes
Like tissue boxes,
To do it again
To someone else.
The baby looks with doe eyes
At the ceiling.
Its fingers curl over the blanket
Like a sea anemone.
How wondrous it must be
To look at the ceiling
And be amazed, Ada thinks.
It curls towards her chest,
It touches her skin.
Its hands are warm
And curious.
Not mother

Ada

Doesn’t cry when Ruth comes
With a baby carrier
And papers.
Ada signs them
With a black pen
Ruth lends her.
Its ink is dark and velvety.
She slips it
Into her pocket
When Ruth isn’t looking.
“What are you going to call it?” Ada asks.
Ruth looks at the baby,
Ada doesn’t hear his name,
She lets it wash over her
Like a wave.
When Ruth leaves Ada notices
That her sister’s smile
Is no longer killing,
It is lovely.
The husband
He comes to see her
He brings flowers.
Yellow ones.
He sits on the bed
While she puts her things
Into a bag
With trembling hands.
He leans across her,
Picks up her hairbrush
From the table.
She sits down beside him
And turns towards the window.
She closes her eyes
As long strokes of love
Slip between his fingers.
He leans forward
Speaks something
Into her hair
Which smells of yellow.
Colour

Outside their house
The trees grow leaves
Like a thousand fingers
Decorated
With purple,
Pink,
And white rings
Of flowers.
They brighten the sky,
A blue eye, reflecting
All that goes on
Beneath.

The trouble with flowers
Is they bloom,
Nature’s fireworks,
Before falling
To the grass like
So many
Broken hands.
Family

They play house
For a while.
Ada cooks things
She finds in books
Left to her
By her mother.
Her mother was
A fresh slash of lipstick
For when her husband came home.
She smelt of geraniums
And betadine.
She was a perpetual apron,
Baking, roasting, grilling.
She was a song quietly sung,
A mender of socks and fears,
A quick pat on the back
For a job well done.
Ada wants to give all this.
She looks in books
For the recipe.


Liesel: Fiction

I’m named after a character
In a book.

It’s about a girl
Who steals books from Germans
During the Second World War.

Mum says
She’s tough.

Dad says they made
A movie about it
It was so successful.

I’ve never been
On TV before.

It would be like
Seeing yourself in the mirror,
Only what you’re seeing
Isn’t the same as what you’re doing.
You would be trapped in glass
That cannot be shattered.

You would be
Unbreakable.
Sun and Shadows

My father
Is tall.
I come up to his knees,
Always dressed in straight trousers.
I have to look up to see
His face, which always seems
To be hidden in a dark cloud
That he can’t escape.
When mum doesn’t come home
At night
I can’t even see his face
Through the black.
Sometimes, though,
He’ll pick me up from school,
Not seeing the other mothers
Looking sideways at him.
He can crush them all,
But he’ll only look at me,
And give such a smile
As if he’s swallowed the sun.
Different

I know my mother
Is different
From other kids’ mother’s
When she serves
Lemon meringue pie for tea sometimes,
And drinks red cordial
From a glass
Late into the night.
As we sit down
At the dinner table,
Dad asks with one corner
Of his mouth going up,
If we have to eat the pie
With a knife and fork.
The taste
Of sweet bitterness
Explodes in my mouth
Long after I’ve gone to bed.
Split ends

Mum sits
On the back step
In the afternoon light
Cutting her hair.
She doesn’t have a mirror,
She just cuts.
I ask her what she’s doing.
“I’m cutting off the split ends,” she says.
Mum tells me
It’s when your hair breaks into pieces
And only scissors
Can fix it.
I watch as strands of gold
Float off into the yard.
I say she has nice hair
And it doesn’t need cutting.
She laughs.
Says she doesn’t know
Why she bothers.
“It’s dead anyway.”
Missing
Mum isn’t at home
When I get back from school.
Mrs Randall, who lives next door,
Dropped me off, because I’m friends
With her son James.
I dump my bag by the front door
And go outside
And play with James until
It gets dark
And his mother calls him in.
I walk home and see Dad’s car
In the garage.
I go into the kitchen
Where Dad has set the table
For two.
“Where’s Mum?” I ask.
Dad looks at me for a long time
Before saying quietly,
“You can’t have pie for dinner
Every night.”

Later,
I kneel on my bed,
Look out the window
Onto the street,
But I can’t see Mum,
Just the street,
And the houses,
And the street lights
Throwing balls of light
Onto the road
Brightening nothing.

I do this for three nights
Before I stop looking.
Liar

Dad calls me
Into the lounge room
On the fourth night
And says mum has a sister
And she’s staying with her
For a while.
He says sometimes
People get sad
And lonely
And need some space to get better.
When I get sad,
I go to Mum
Or Dad.
I don’t think Mum has either of those
Which makes me sad.
But then I get angry
Because
She never told me
She had a sister.
**The photograph**

I start feeling sick
And dizzy,
Like when you go too high
On the swings at the park,
And you can feel your stomach
In your mouth.
Dad catches me before I hit my head
On the coffee table.
He puts me in his lap
And strokes my hair
Until I stop feeling sick.

“I’ll show you something,” he says.
I follow him to his study
Which smells of leather and paper.
He picks me up and sits me in his chair.
Only Dad sits in his chair.
He opens the bottom drawer of his desk
And slips out a photograph.
It’s from the olden days.
Brown and wrinkled.
In the picture is a young man
In a uniform
Standing in front of an aeroplane.
He smiles into the camera
Like he is shy.
I look up at Dad
Who smiles the same smile.
He tells me he flew planes
In the Vietnam War.
He then pulls out a book from the drawer,
And turns to a page and shows me
A picture of a girl
And a boy
Running down a road
With no clothes on.
“Sometimes,” he says,
“People do horrible things,
But only realise they’re horrible
After
They’ve done them.”
Black

All I think of is Mum
When I go to bed.
In my mind
She is standing in her nice dress
She sometimes wears
When she goes out with Dad.
It’s got bright flowers on it.
But all around her is all black,
Like a petal floating on the sea,
Because I don’t know where she is.
I don’t know what to think.
She could be running
With no clothes on,
Burning
Alive,
And I
Wouldn’t know.
Just two

On Saturday
I usually go and play with James.
Sometimes we get to bake things
In his mum’s kitchen.
But I don’t want to do
Anything today.
I sit and watch TV
All morning,
Until Dad comes into the room
And says,
“Let’s go to the park.”
When we get there
Dad pushes me on the swings.
He’s good at pushing,
I go really high.
He even has a go as well.
When we finish at the park
Dad gives me a ride
On his back
All the way home
Sleepless

When it’s time for bed
Dad tucks me in and says,
“It’s not so bad
With two,”
And I go to sleep feeling OK.
Later in the night
I get up
To get a drink from the kitchen.
The clock in the hallway
Says 1.23am.
I walk past Dad’s study.
I see Dad sitting in his chair
In the dark
Looking out the window.
I think he’s doing work, at first
But it’s too late for that.
He’s looking out the window
For Mum.

I realise

Dad’s been doing this
Every
Night,
Even after I
Had stopped looking.

I walk into the kitchen
and turn on the tap.

I watch
as the water
pours out
and slips
down the drain,
gone.
The beach

A woman stands
At the edge of the beach.
She feels the water
Rushing into her shoes.
Warm,
Then cold, colder.
She takes one step,
Then another,
Until she’s waist-deep in.
Her dress sticks to her body.
Sunken flowers.
She dips her head under,
Stretches out her limbs,
And begins
Swimming.
Stroke after stroke
She swims towards the sun,
Until even that
 Falls
Beneath the ocean.
Drowning

The phone rings

And rings

And rings in his ears

Long after

He answers.
Nobody home

We don’t go to the park
The next day
Or the day
After that.
I go to school,
Dad picks me up
From school.
I come home,
I watch TV,
I eat,
I go to bed.
It goes on
And on
Like this.
Simon: Our bedroom

On the bedside table
Of our bedroom
Is Adas’s hair comb.
It’s clear
With plastic teeth.
I pick it up,
Run my fingers over it.
If I put it up to my nose
It will smell of her.
How I can I tell Liesel
That her mother isn’t coming home.
That she went to the beach
And only her shoes
Came back.
Simon: Not Ada

It isn’t Ada

Lying on the table.

It’s someone else’s wife

It’s someone else’s mother.

Someone

Else.

Please.

They’ve covered her body in a sheet.

The fishes

Got in everywhere.

I’m given a piece of paper

To read

And sign.

A full stop marks

The end of a sentence.

I fall

For eternity

Into its black depth.
Home Time

I walk out the front gate of school
But Dad isn’t here.
He’s always here.
I sit on the fence and wait.
Sometimes he listens to his music
And gets so into it that I have to yell really loud
For him to hear me.
Dad Dad Dad.
It’s weird because
I thought only young people liked loud music.
It’s almost as if
He plays it loud enough
He might hear something
He hasn’t heard before.
Maybe he’s listening to his music
And lost the time.
The sun goes down in front of me,
Its arms on fire reaching out for shade.
I close my eyes but I can still see
A white circle
Burning at the front my mind.
“Are you ok, Liesel?”
I open my eyes.
It’s Mrs McSevich,
My teacher.
I look up at her
She is covered in tiny spots
Like confetti.
I rub my eyes.
“Dad’s late.”
Mrs McSevich looks at me
But not in the way that the mothers look
At my Dad.
“I’ll take you home,”
She says.

When I get home
Dad is there on the floor
Without a face.
He’d put newspaper down
So he wouldn’t ruin the carpet,
And all I can think of is
Nothing.
Like when you think something
Is going to happen
And it doesn’t.
Like a movie that ends
Unexpectedly,
Or a blank page
Where you were just reading
A story.
It’s as if for one second
The world is tilting,
And you scramble
To hold onto something,
Like a chair or a desk
Or a pair
Of neat trousers.
Dad forgot
To newspaper the walls.
It doesn’t matter anyway
Because I throw up.
Stranger

The funeral
Is weird.
There are lots of people I don’t know.
The only person I know here is Dad
But I can’t talk to him.
People keep saying they’re sorry,
But I thought you only say sorry
When you’ve done something wrong.
Like when you upset someone
Or call them names.
Or when you kill someone
And go to jail.
They didn’t kill Dad.
I know because he left a letter
On my bed.
He put it in one of the envelopes
He only used for work.
It was heavy
And smooth
Like the gun I found.
Lost

I stay with a woman
Who’s from a department
That looks after kids
Who have no parents
And no
Other family.
I remember a kid from school
Saying they went to the pound once
To pick out a dog
To take home and keep.
He said all the dogs there
Had been disowned
Or abandoned.
I sleep in a room that isn’t mine.
I howl all night
For someone
To come and collect me
And take me
Back home.
Family

I hear her shoes first.
I’m sitting in the lounge room
Not watching the TV
When she comes in
And sits down
Across from me.
She has long dark hair
That slips over her shoulders,
And large hands
With long, thin fingers,
Which she puts into mine
And squeezes gently.
No one has ever
Shaken my hand before.
Her name is Ruth
Like ruthless.
She’s my mother’s sister
She’s my family.
Three words
I don’t feel dizzy or sick
When Ruth tells me this.
I haven’t felt sick
Since Dad died.
She wants me
To come and live with her
And her son.
His name is Max.
He’s older than me, she says.
“But a good kid.”
She looks at me
With my mother’s eyes
And says
She knows.
She hands me an envelope,
It’s from Mum.
I open it up and my heart explodes
With three words.
You.
Max: Going home

Some things
Are immeasurable.
The ocean,
Grains of sand,
The look in someone’s eye
When they see
Something beautiful.
I go with Mum
To pick up Liesel.
She’s already standing outside
Waiting for us.
She gets in the back seat,
And from the front
I can hear her heart
Inside her chest.
Even
After all this
It’s beating, not
Beaten.
**Max: Her name**

On her lap

Is a book.

I ask her what she’s reading.

She looks at me

From the back seat.

“The Book Thief,” she says.

I smile.

I’ve read it.

“You’ll like Liesel,” I say.

She looks at me again.

This time, one side of her mouth

Goes up.

On the way home

Liesel opens the book.

She reads her story

She reads herself,

Its thousand pages lift her up

Like so many paper wings.