

There is something else. My thoughts are not here. They are not here.

My lips taste like tannin. I suck on the insides of them while my mother takes our picture. They taste like they are stained burgundy. Nobody has said anything yet about what they look like. I wonder if they will notice, but it does not worry me.

I wonder.... His lips were swollen red that night. I thought more than once of draining them. He filled up my glass and told me I did not have to drink all of it. I laughed and said, "I have been drinking wine since I was ten years old." He looked at me and smiled. "I forget. In America, you couldn't get into a nightclub."

I feel my arm secured by my sister, who tucks her hands back into her pockets immediately. I relax into her warm wool coat, and regret not bringing my own. I know she feels my body stiffen from the cold wind, and I know she disapproves. Hadn't she pulled my coat and gloves out and laid them on my bed like she does every Sunday before our drive? She wouldn't understand why I forgot.

"Would you mind if I had a smoke?" he had asked, and I was not sure what reaction he expected. I knew he didn't mean cigarettes.

"Okay," I said. He led me to a small room where we sat, knee to knee. My head became heavy from the wine and the smoke he was pouring out of his mouth like a bowl. When he reached for his knapsack, I had a sudden impulse to reach out and touch him. I extended my fingertips, then relaxed them again. He must have felt this because he looked up suddenly, the question in his eyes growing.

Vicki swings her bare legs back and forth, laughing. She is the youngest of us sisters. Our mother's voice grows louder as she tells Vicki to sit still. As my mother readjusts us in the camera frame, Vicki wiggles her arms out from her body and puts them, one each, around my two sisters. The picture is taken before my sister Beatrice can extricate the hand. I close my eyes and listen to my breaths.

He had been watching me. I folded the page back carefully behind my fingers and started to read. Then I stopped. "You can skip this part if you'd like," he had said carefully. I looked up and into his eyes. "No, it has to be read," I said. "All of it."

My eyes must have shone with the imagery. Every word, every description was whole and flavorful. I hadn't known poetry like this existed, or how it was related to the poetry that we translated in school. The poetry I read that night was alive, agile.

As I read, I could sense him stirring. He leaned towards me, his weight on the palm of his hands. I could feel him shift his weight from one hand to the other as I read the last line of the poem. I closed the book and set it down against my side. I waited for his response, but he said nothing. From the corner of my eye I could see the shadow where his black hair covered his forehead. I did not look up.

He let me borrow the book of poetry, which I hid in the folds of my skirt as I walked

into my door. I knew if my mother saw it she would ask about it. She would know I had not gone on a bicycle ride, as I had told her. Now, as my mother rearranges my sisters and me for a third picture, I feel a slight tug toward the book, hidden in my book bag on the back car seat. It is as if it has a strong scent, a musk needing to be covered over. I look over my shoulder at the backseat, but all I can see is one strap of black canvas hanging limp over the edge. I close my eyes again. There is something else, I repeat to myself, pressing my eyelids shut. There is something else.

Annie Krug, 1997