

Vivica

Simple words for simple minds.

Synapses tautly wired, apprehension snaps my vertebrae. Nevertheless I *rise and shine* in my own apartment where no one tells me to. In the kitchen where the coffee maker drips, Lizard lazy on my back, out of sorts this morning.

Releasing Minor God through the window, I see a brightly shining sun. I fill my cup, stirring in the cream and sugar with one of two mismatched teaspoons. *I Left My Heart In Saskatoon* declares the mug adorned with bouquets of tiny valentines.

Simple words for simple minds, the adage leaping to my tongue in someone else's voice. I strain it through my lips, careful, for a clue. I see a child with neatly plaited hair and a woman near to her. An older woman, and from her the phrase sounds awkward, as though the English is not free.

The child is young, perhaps as young as two. She giggles shyly, and braids her fingers in and out. Gently I step inside her body. *Look up!* I whisper, *I want to see!*

Vivica! the woman says, you hear? You understand?

Her skin is creased and tawny, eyes the purest azure, hair a nest of silver curls. Tiny diamonds sparkle on her earlobes. These two are seated by a gleaming wooden table, sunlight pouring over them through glass.

Vivica. The name repeated by the child. While she says it, she raises one small finger and points it at herself.

Yes! You! the woman sings. Her smile lights up the child. Like me, she has a deep dimple in her right cheek.

Simple words for simple minds, the child parrots.

That's right! The woman laughs. Simple minds like yours, Vivica, she points, and mine, she points. And who am I? she asks.

Grandmum, the child replies promptly. Yes! the woman says, And you know what else? Vivica is my name also!

I sway between two worlds. Lift my mug, sip my coffee. Simple words for simple minds, I muse. I hope it will be a portal but it is now shut. But still I know the name. I write it on my pad in bold block letters

VIVICA

so I won't forget. Then I leave a message for Ruby's dick to phone me back.

gravity

I putter in my apartment. A series of small chores to busy hands and feet, keeping free the mind. There is no cleaning therapy at the institution because it just encourages the crazies.

Those obsessed with cleaning tend to overspecialize. A single item washed repeatedly is perceived to be a useless skill. Repetition is disease.

I lift a dripping sponge to swipe across the ceiling, soapy water spiralling down along my arm. Gravity, when what goes up must come down. Gravity is also sadness.

I think of graves. I think of burying and of the body of my mother, not buried but cremated. To me, the coroner presented a sack of useless junkie ash.

If Mother had a tombstone, I would carve this on it:

She Served The Middle Classes

absent

Selma is another link in the social safety net with which they have enveloped me. She knows that I am damaged but she says she is determined that I will *not slip away*. She asks no explanation and she never marks me absent.

Poetry with Selma runs from Sappho to Socrates, Lenny Bruce to Kurt Cobain. Selma lives to share. She peppers me with books and music to occupy my time between appointments, and courts me on the sly with pizza and latte when we should be *debriefing* in her office.

Selma has white hair dyed green or blue or pink. Selma has a breathless way of speech. Selma has a rainbow for a smile. Selma wears red stiletto heels with army pants on the day she disappears.

solace

A poem is a painting, Selma says. A poem leaves a space. It gathers in the unanticipated, and it offers shelter. Shifts perspective, alters time. Its purpose is to warp and clarify, to solace and enrage. Selma is herself a perfect blissful poem.

touch

There are implants for the deaf and lasers for the blind. There are pharmaceuticals for the smell- and taste-impaired, but there is nothing to replace touch. My skin is wired from the lack of it.

played

After all these battles we have waged. After all this time, after all the years of mothers smiling helplessly while showing their collective empty palms to us. Any way you hold it in your heart, we have all been played.

solid lead

Vivica! enthuses Ruby's dick. Now that at least is more than nothing. That at least is something. You say the grandmother is foreign, now there is what I'd call a solid lead.

He paws the paper I have passed to him on which that name is penned.

Every time I try to speak the name aloud, my voice shuts down.

breeding

Inside me are sifting thoughts of Ruby. She is a heavy hammer with no purpose. She is a rock lodged firmly in between my rage and my obsession, past which I cannot breathe.

I call upon the widow, but her maid says she is out of town, and so I drift away through massive double-pillared gates. Perhaps the Judge made her a deal, a solitary stone slung at two bad birds. Savannah, raw with envy, and the Judge with reputation to uphold. No price too steep for peace of mind. Savannah had been his choice for Adam. She, who learned to shoot at Daddy's knee. We three were bred like race horses, Ruby mocks.

Tonight the beach is barren. It would be easy now to swim out and not return. I would not be missed till Gobbler's Tuesday visit. The moon winks through tumid clouds. But I pull myself to shore, spear my jacket from a rock and with it, wipe the moisture from my face.

Swimming has restored my hearing. I hear a bleating foghorn and the distant whistle of a train. I step into my sneakers and begin my uphill climb. Four more days between tonight and Tuesday.