

MIKE SPRY

THE FOLLICULAR

I.

Let's say it's five-thirty am, and you're reading her horoscope
for the third time, but you can't remember when her birthday is.
You recall a good August and think maybe that was it.
Maybe she's a Virgo too.

*Whilst we are not all superhuman,
some of us are at least able to go to sleep
without pissing ourselves in the night.
Write a lot of letters today, you like licking stamps.
Abstain from gratuitous sex and granola.*

The horoscope rings true. Granola makes you irregular,
and abstinence isn't the challenge that it used to be.
You get up six and a half times a night to urinate.
You can't safely consume liquids after 9pm.
You don't know what a prostate is, but you're sure yours is either inflamed,
swollen, or injured in some way. Last week you had a mango juice at 10:30.
and blamed the wet spot on the cat. You don't own a cat.
You'll write letters to a girl and never send them.

II.

Let's suppose you have a wife, but it isn't her.
Doesn't even look like her.
Doesn't take her boots to bed.
Doesn't know any Cheap Trick.
Doesn't like your dad. Won't do that thing.
Your wife of five years is sitting across from you,
not wearing boots, not humming Surrender,
drinking coffee the way only a Diane or a Margaret would.
And the moment doesn't matter.
It is unimportant.
Your wife is menstruating. Thank god, she's menstruating.
You're fond of her cycle. You like the follicular, the luteal.
Hell, you even like the feminine hygiene industry.
Because it means you don't have to touch her, taste her,
or struggle inside her as the blue haze
of sitcoms lights the neighbours' den.

III.

Let's assume you've become an idiot.
You refer to the local sports franchise in the first person plural.
You believe Diet Coke will save your life.
You find the work of Dan Brown challenging.
"My French stinks, Langdon thought, but my zodiac iconography is pretty good."
You use the word 'gay' as a verb.
and order the Filet-o-Fish because it's the healthy choice.
Variety is masturbating with your left hand.
You spell toque without an o.
Everything suddenly requires mayonnaise.

You have two kids, named after a goaltender and a *Grey's Anatomy* character.
They're alright. The girl has a chance.
She seems okay. At four she seems prepared. The boy's another story.
Can't seem to figure out math or pants. Likes licking things too much.
They're Virgos. They both stare at their parents too often, too skeptically.
Mommy's alright, Daddy's alright, they just seem a little weird.

IV.

Let's look back for a minute at 1999.
You're in love with a girl named Chloe.
It's the only time in your life that you'll ever be in love
with a girl named Chloe. And Chloe's just like you,
only beautiful.
She is flawless and dangerous,
and each minute you spend with her is a minute
she might stab you with the pen knife tucked in her boot.
When you fuck, she won't kiss you.
You don't know why, but you like it.
Because every other girl you've ever loved
would kiss you—even though you're only 22
and have loved every girl you've ever helped out of panties
or into a sedan, or seen at a Harvey's.

And Chloe fucks with you. She takes you to gay bars
and shares ecstasy with you. She brings you
to the dance floor, rips off your shirt,
and leaves you there. Things happen.
And Chloe and you go to see *Star Wars Episode I*,
on opening night, and you've taken mushrooms,

and something powdery, off blueish, off kilter,
and during the explosion of the DTS crescendo,
something in your left ear pops, and to this day in any loud room
it crackles like AM radio fifty kilometres from nowhere.
And Chloe has a male roommate, who doesn't speak English,
and who calls her Crowee. He makes boisonberry pancakes.
He has a boyfriend with a name that rhymes with capsizes.
Both have stares that loiter Chloe too long,
which makes you at once proud and scared and hopeless.
Her bedroom leans over an alley
and smells like vanilla.
She wears a Pavement T-Shirt to bed,
and her pillows taste like cologne.
You don't wear cologne.

And then she left. Or you did.
Promised to write long lingering letters to one another.
Who writes letters? you asked. *We do*, she replied.
We're the last. At which point she leaned in,
lips pursed, and didn't kiss you goodbye.
And it seemed like nothing, until one day
you're unhappily contemplating granola,
not humming Surrender,
considering the night before and buying a cat,
wondering if Pavement's even still together.
Missing pancakes, missing your dad,
checking if *we* won last night,
acknowledging Harvey's doesn't even serve fish,
wishing you had a third hand,
needing a urologist, waiting for the movie version.
Sitting with your wife,
who drinks coffee the way only a Diane
or a Margaret would.