



**somebody
say
something**

janet kuypers

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A Life Goes By

1978. Mom and Dad on vacation. Sister in college. Grandma baby sitting. She taught me how to play Gin Rummy in the living room. I smudge the finish on the wood table every time I put my hand on it. We play cards for hours.

1983. Grandma is over to baby sit. Sister comes home. “Why isn’t dinner ready, Grandma?” “I didn’t know how to turn on the oven.”

She was a sly old fox, my sister said. She knew how to turn on an oven. Got out of having to make dinner. The chicken kiev was a half hour late.

1986. Spring. Friday, 4:55 p.m. Mom and Dad and Sister dressed for dinner. Dad is waiting for Mom at the door. They still had to pick up Grandma before they drove to Mike Moy’s Restaurant. Mom is checking her eye make-up in the bedroom mirror.

I stand in the doorway to her room. “Are you sure you don’t want to go with us?”, she asks. I’d rather stay in the house by myself, play loud music. I was a rebellious youth. I say no. “Tell Grandma I said hi.”

1988. Sister calls. “Grandma is moving to Arizona,” she says. “She’s going to live with Aunt Rose.” She’s leaving in five days.

3 days later. I call her. I tell her I will try to visit her next summer. I tell her I will miss her. I already do miss her. She says she loves me.

I hang up, thinking that she usually doesn’t say that she loves people. She isn’t usually affectionate. I start to cry.

3 days later. I visit family. Father hugs me. He hiccups while crying.

She died this morning, they explain to me. But don’t worry about that now, we’re late for the Christmas party.

I’m in a car. Sister is driving to the family party. We are quiet. She finally speaks. “Are you okay?”, and I tell her that I will be fine. What she doesn’t realize is that I don’t say that I am fine. I look at her face. She turns her

head from the road to look at me. I notice now that we really do look alike.

Something in Sister is dead. She is hiding the pain, and it is killing a piece of her. I think a part of me is dying, too.

At the party. Everyone is laughing. Brothers, sisters, nephews, a niece, an uncle. A sister-in-law says to me as she says hello, "I'm sorry." I try to get drunk on punch.

Sister pulls out a pile of presents for the family. They are from Grandma. Jesus Christ. She died this morning. Somebody say something.

She bought me a pair of earrings.

Father's Tears

I never really knew him.
I knew the smell of his work boots
from the construction site,
I knew the smell of the martinis
waiting for him at home.
I knew the sound of his walk:
his ankles cracking,
his keys rattling.
I knew the sternness of his voice,
and I knew
that around me
he only smiled for photographs.

Emotions had their place for him.
He reserved happiness for friends,
anger for home.
In everything he did and felt
he showed strength and power.

I've seen him cry twice.

Once he cut his hand with a saw.
I saw fabric four inches thick
soaked with blood around his hand.
I saw the drops of blood on the car seat.
He drove himself to the hospital.
He was always in control.
But I heard the tears of pain in his voice.
I stood in the driveway and cried.

Once I heard him arguing with a friend.
I heard his voice from the hallway,
but I didn't recognize his voice at all:
it sounded confused, weak. Distraught.
I walked up to the door,
looking through the square window.
His voice choked and gasped.
The muscles in his face were contorted,
and it was as if the wrinkles
in his eyebrows cried,
"How could you hurt me so?
How could you do this to me?"
It was as if he screamed at being weak.

I moved away from the door
before he could see me. But I still
heard his voice; I had to run outside.

I think I didn't want to believe
that he was human.

They Called It Trust

Do you remember when
it was 1:30 a.m. one rainy night
and you asked me what
I wanted to do?
I told you that I wanted
to take a bottle of champagne,
climb on to the roof of your house
and toast in the pouring rain.

You asked me why I said that.
I shrugged my shoulders flippantly
and said that it was something to do.
But I was testing you.
I was afraid to ask
if you would follow me
when I told you to trust me.

And that is why I trusted you
when you poured the champagne
and kissed my wet skin

Motorcycle

you scared me. but i liked it.
i remember sitting behind you
on your motorcycle. i think
my fingers shook as i held your waist.
and i remember looking at my head
on your shoulder in the rear-view mirror.
and i smiled, because it was your shoulder.
as i felt more comfortable with you,
i moved my head closer
to your neck, smelled your cologne,
felt the warmth radiate from your skin.

you scared me. i clenched
your waist every time
i thought you should have used the brakes.
but i still sat behind you. besides,
it was a good excuse
to hold on to you.

addict.

i was sitting in the front seat of lisa's car, i can't remember if it was a rental or her dad's car. my face and chest were sunburnt, i could feel the top layer of my skin burning. i was wearing a peach shirt with a mini-skirt; i remember that i always had to dress up when i was with her, men always thought she was prettier. i was sitting in the front seat, it was night, lisa was driving, she just finished putting on her burgundy lipstick with her rear-view mirror and she lit a virginia slims menthol with the car lighter. my father always hated her. we parked in front of some strip store, probably off davis boulevard, and david was getting out the back so he could buy a pack of cigarettes, too. marlboro lights. they were the closest thing to those french canadian things he smoked. the ones where the box held two rows of ten instead of two of seven and one of six. the ones that were shorter than marlboros. when he got out of the car, i asked lisa what was wrong with david. he usually loved any opportunity to get out of the mobile home park. but the whole car ride he barely spoke. so lisa said that david was going through withdrawal, that he had no cocaine this vacation and he's got the shakes or something. i don't know if it was the shakes; whatever you get when you stop taking coke, that was happening to him. and i was mad because he never told me, and i was mad because he was fucked up from the stuff in the first place. and i had to act like i knew nothing when he got back in the car.

Age

Sometimes, when I get behind the wheel of a car, I feel like I'm at Six Flags Great America Amusement Park In Gurnee, Illinois again and I'm thirteen years old and I'm able to drive one of the bumper cars. And it's such a thrill -- because, I mean, I'm thirteen years old and I can't drive, and I'm now in control of this huge piece of machinery. Granted, there's this wire sticking up from the car that gets electricity from the ceiling, but for once I feel free, that I can just go, go faster than I ever could by running, or even if I used my roller skates or my bicycle.

And when I get that feeling and I'm behind the wheel of my car I want to drive really really fast out on an abandoned road, blare some rock music, roll down my window, and turn up the heat, since it's the middle of winter.

Sometimes, when I go out on a new date, I feel like I'm sixteen again, and I'll rifle through my closet, deciding I have absolutely nothing to wear. And he'll pick me up, and we'll go to a restaurant with deer heads on the walls, and we'll have whiskey sours, and we'll struggle with the lettuce leaves in the salads because they're too big, and when we're done with dinner we'll go to a bar that's so crowded and so loud that we won't be able to talk to each other, but we'll have to stand real close. And then he'll take me home and I'll invite him in, he'll sit on the chair, I'll sit on the couch, and he'll ask for a glass of water. When we can't think of any more small talk, and the clock says 3:12 a.m., I'll see him to the door, he'll kiss me good-bye, and I'll lock the door after he leaves. And when I'm sure he can't see me through the window, I'll turn on the stereo and dance in my living room before I go to bed.

Sometimes, when I'm having sex with someone, I feel like I've done this for years, like I've been married to this man for twenty years, and I still don't know him, but I'm still there, night after night. After the wedding, after the new house, which was a little small, but we'll get something bigger when we have the money, after the two kids and the fifteen pounds, after I lose my job, after we don't get that new house and after the kids complain about their curfews, after the dog dies, hell, it was only trouble for us anyway, after the sinus headaches, the back problems, that all-over sore feeling, you know, it's harder to wake up in the mornings now, after it all he still has the nights, the sex with the woman he knows all too well but not at all, and we do it, as we always do. It becomes memorization. It becomes like a play, that I act out night after night.

Sometimes, when I get home after 10 o'clock from working overtime on the computers, I just want to retire, to quit the work, to stop it all. I see my parents, after a life of working at the construction site and raising five children, now beginning to relax, buying a small home in Southwest Florida, playing tennis in the morning, playing cards in the afternoon, drinking with other retired couples in the evening. Sometimes another couple invites them out for a boat ride off of Marco Island, where they smoke cigarettes, drink a few beers, and drive slow enough to make no wake when they're by the pier.

Sometimes I look at the computer screen I work at and remember how computers used to mean video games. I remember when I was eight and I would sit with my best friend in the upstairs den on the floor in front of the old television set and play table tennis on our Atari. Times change, I suppose, and I get old. This is my life.

What You Could Make Me Do

I

I remember when you and Brad and Joe and I
decided to kill a bottle of champagne, Andre pink, two-for-five,
on a building top in the December cold.

I remember standing at the top of this building
with this bottle of cheap champagne in my hand
and not caring that it was cold, that I was breaking the law.

I was young, and free. And I had friends.

We stood in the shape of a triangle and made the person in the center
drink. I said they had to spin while they drank,
then belch when they were done.

Brad and Joe were more than willing; the belching was
a contest for them. And I became one of the boys for a night,
to become closer to you.

You didn't want to belch, or spin, or really even drink.

I didn't make you. But you did. And I'd like to think that in your heart
you did it because you wanted to follow me.

I've always wanted to tell you
that I wanted to follow you, too.

II

I got your watch engraved the day of my Christmas party.

I didn't want to bother with wrapping the thing,

besides, I didn't even have a box for it,

so I just wore it. You never knew it was there.

When you couldn't take the suspense any longer,

I told you that I had it on me.

It must have been quite a sight to see you walking in circles
around me, trying to figure out what I was hiding from you.

But I wasn't even hiding it. I was wearing it on my wrist,
with my other watch, as plain as day.

III

So I made a full picnic and brought it to an empty theater.
And I put on my best black dress, you know, the one
that is off the shoulders, the one I wear to make heads turn.
I set out the food, played slow music and put the champagne glasses
you bought me on the center of the stage floor. When I sat down
I was afraid splinters from the hard-wood floor
would run my stockings. But I wanted you to see what you
could make me do. I didn't want you to think I was some
nobody. And I wanted to see the look on your face
when you opened the theater doors.
That night you said that everything
was perfect. But it was perfect
only when you sat down to join me.

Clay

so I was at this bar, on the coast of florida -- the west coast, the gulf side, you know. it was this place called lana kai, and my friend gave me a ride all the way from naples, which is a good forty-five minutes south of the place.

and so we were sitting there at the bar, which is half indoors and half on the beach, and all these old men kept staring at my friend's chest. a couple guys bought us beer and one guy asked me to dance. I was surprised he asked me to dance, and not my friend -- men were usually more attracted to her.

but the guys were jerks anyway -- one looked like a marine with that haircut and must have been high on something, one looked like he decided to forgo hygiene, another was twice my age. it's not as if I try to pick up men in bars anyway.

so after a while I couldn't stand being at the bar, next to the reggae band that was playing (I never really liked reggae music anyway, I mean, it's too slow to dance to), so I begged my friend to come walk with me on the beach.

christ, I felt like a ten-year-old with a bucket and shovel when I kicked off my black suede shoes and ran into the water. I always loved the feel of sand when it's drenched in water. it feels like clay as it seeps around my toes, pulling me into the ground.

so there I was, splashing in the water, wearing a black sequin dress, throwing my purse to the shore, taking a swig from my can of miller lite. this was life, I thought. pure and simple. an army couldn't have dragged me out of the water.

so my friend found some guy to hit on, as she usually does, and she wanted me to hit on his friend. I found him ugly as all sin, and impossible to talk to. I told him that one of the rafts on the shore was mine, and instead of driving to the bar I sailed. and he believed me. I told my friend flat out that I wouldn't go with him. she was pissed that I didn't find him good-looking.

so then He strolled up from the bar to the beach, an intriguing stranger, and He walked up right next to me in the water, still wearing his shoes, seem-

ing to know that I needed to be saved. as most knights in shining armor would.

and He said hello to me, and He started talking to me, and He cracked a few jokes, and He made me laugh.

and okay, I'll admit it -- he was good-looking, really good looking. I remember at one point, looking at him made me think of a greek statue, He had this curly hair, this sharp chin, these strong cheek bones. but those greek statues could never talk to me, they have no color, they don't come alive. they're made of stone.

His name was Clay. and when we talked He crept into my pores, the way the sand made it's way between my toes. His voice tunneled into me, boring me hollow, making me anxiously wait to be filled with more and more of His words.

my friend disappeared with her new-found monosyllabic lover, for hours, until long after the bar closed, leaving me stranded. there I was, forty-five miles north of my home at 2:20 in the morning with no means of transportation. it could have been worse, I could have been somewhere other than on the beach, I could have been sober, and I might not have had a knight in shining armor named Clay to save me.

and as He drove me home (an hour and a half out of his way), I couldn't help but run my fingers through his hair, it was an uncontrollable impulse, like the urge to drag your fingers deep into the wet sand. I told Him I was just trying to keep Him awake for the drive.

it's almost better if I never see Him again. then I can always think of Him this way.

Confident Women

I met up with an old friend of mine for drinks last week. I knew her in high school, although we weren't close friends then. In those days she needed therapy, had problems with drugs, I think, or else it was just family problems. I was a bit insecure myself, shy, meek, scared of life. Since those days we matured, we're now more independent, self-confident, self-assured women. It was good to see her again. She just came back from camping in Australia; although physically I had gone nowhere, we both had our stories to tell over a bottle or two of wine. And we gossiped, she told me of the handsome Australian man she fell for, I told her of the roller-coaster I call my romantic life. And we laughed. And then the gossip changed, her voice lowered, and sounding stern but quiet, she told me of how a man broke into her apartment one night last summer and he tried to rape her, and after kicking and screaming in her underwear she managed to break free and her attacker escaped. She told me they found the man, and the trial is scheduled for later in the month. And she sat there, with her wine glass in her hand, looking so confident, as if she knew she won this battle. Trying not to sound corny, I told her I could give her a hug. And she leaned on my shoulder, and she cried, hiccuping as she tried to catch her breath. They

would make her recount everything
on the stand, she said, and the defense
lawyers would try to make her sound
promiscuous because she slept
alone in her underwear. I told her I
would go with her to the trial. I told her
she is winning by speaking out.
Self-assured women. Confident women.
How confident are we supposed to be?

David

When I know you're not going out anywhere in the morning,
I get dressed, brew some flavored coffee, put it
in a thermos, and bring my book
to that hut on the corner of San Lu Rue Avenue.
The coffee tastes good when the Florida air
is just chilly enough to open your eyes.
I sit there, and I write, usually about
you, and I wait.
I know you're a late riser, but
within a half hour you're there.
Empty mug in one hand, drawing book and pencils
in the other. Cigarettes in pocket.
You look tired. But I'm awake.

I used to fear for your life, you know, when you were messed up with the drugs, the gangs. I'd sit up nights wondering why you didn't call. I'd wonder if you were dead. I'd wonder if you were beaten up, bleeding on a subway, trying to hold your ribs in place. It hurt to care from five hundred miles away, for someone who couldn't care for himself.

I'm glad that you straightened yourself out. Or I'm glad you almost did.

I remember being in your car, driving back from Tiger Tail beach. My skin felt itchy from the salt. My feet were sticking out the window, pressed against the rear-view mirror. I think you were holding my hand.

This was after you told me you wanted me to marry you. You never asked me to marry you, but you told me that's what you wanted. I should have expected that from you. But you always surprised me.

I remember thinking that we could never get along for any reasonable length of time. You didn't want to leave Canada; I didn't want to leave the States. You wanted to backpack around Europe; I wanted to get a job, an apartment, some security. Vacationing at the tip of this peninsula seemed to be the only way we could meet.

But even though my skin hissed from the salt and the sun, in that car with you I felt like we could go anywhere.

I looked in my purse today
and found a box of Swan Vestas matches. You bought them
at the tobacco shop in the mall in Naples.
You asked me to hold the box for you.
I couldn't understand why you bothered to buy matches
when you could get matchbooks anywhere, but
I must admit that you looked good when you lit one of them.
The box was so big. No American would want
a matchbox that big.
You always struck the match to the box three times
before it would light.
You made the art of lighting a match
seem like a pleasure.

I always liked the smell of sulphur.
I'm glad you forgot that box in my purse.



Doctor

Once upon a time there was a young man who was very intelligent. You could see him at his desk now, writing, or sitting on his bed, leaning against his headboard, reading, studying. And people knew he was intelligent, and people knew he would be a doctor someday. If you got him talking, he'd tell you about starting work in the emergency room, about the people he met, about the lives he wanted to save.

And this man was also a very handsome man, he stood tall, blonde hair, bright blue eyes, eyes like water, reflected in a scalpel. He dressed well, always looked impeccable. And he had a wide, open smile. His mother never had to tell him to brush his teeth every day.

And this man was a charming man, as most would have to be to be a good doctor. He was raised well, given the best of everything, and still taught the value of work. And as you'd get to know him, you'd see that he holds open doors for you, listens intently, pays the bill, laughs at your jokes.

In fact, this man is so charming, so kind, that you'll never see him yell, never see him get angry. He never swears, never cries, never laughs too hard, never has too much fun. He's like a Ken doll. You can be mean to him, you can steal from him, you can rape him. That's part of his charm.

He was so charming. So lifelessly charming.

Just once, I wanted to be able to grab his broad shoulders and shake him, dig my fingers into his flesh, maybe break a nail, maybe bring some more pain into his life. I wanted to grab him, to shake him, to tell him that he needed to feel this pain, he needed to feel it, because without it he couldn't feel the joy, the bliss, the ecstasy of life. When he saves his first life on the operating table, when he falls in love, when his first child is born, these things will all register in his mind, he will understand these things for what they are, but otherwise they will mean nothing to him. How do I tell this charming man, this handsome man, this intelligent man, that he's not living life right? How do I explain these things, how do I explain the color blue to a blind man?

done this before

I keep looking back at your picture. I'll flip it over to stop from staring at it while I read a page from my book, but a minute won't pass before I'll have to turn the photo over again to see your face. It's as if I can't get away from it.

My flight was delayed, I'm at O'Hare Airport, the airport that departs three planes every second, or is it one plane every three seconds, oh shit, I don't remember. I have to wait at least three hours for my next flight, hey, if so many planes take off here, then why can't I get on one of them? Oh well, so I decided to waste my time in one of the airport cocktail bars, by gate L 4. I thought I'd start with a white zinfandel and work my way to mixed drinks, but this wine tastes so good that I think I might just have to have another. I'm so exasperated, I hate to wait, and all I have is a good book to keep me company. I used your photo from my wallet as a bookmark. I need these things to keep me sane.

It really isn't bad here in the cocktail bar by gate L 4, the chairs aren't that uncomfortable, even though they're a pretty ugly shade of green that doesn't match anything in the room. It really isn't that bad, in a foreign city, in a foreign airport. Not when I've got my Sutter Home White Zinfandel. And my picture of you.

You know, there's a blonde girl dressed well with a bad perm across the bar, and she's smoking a cigarette. I know I don't smoke, but I'm almost tempted to ask her for one just so I can hold the cigarette the way you do. I'd like to taste the tar, the nicotine, the way I taste it in your kiss. You think I don't like it, but I do.

They're playing a song in the cocktail bar, a song that reminds me of an ex. I wanted to marry that man. He had a knack of being able to envelope me, to take my troubles away. I don't know if I can take away my troubles myself anymore. I don't know if the liquor's helping, or the cigarettes. Your photo helps, my little bookmark. At least for now it helps.

Sitting in this L 4 cocktail bar reminds me of my brother. When I was young he'd always pick us up at the airport, but if he wasn't waiting at the gate we knew to look for him at the seafood cocktail bar. a part of me expects him to come walking through the doorway now, flannel shirt, ski jacket, wind-blown greasy hair, coke-bottle glasses. You know, when I'd look at his eyes through those glasses, his eyes looked twice as big as they actually were. I could imagine him now, I could imagine the smell of his Levi's of dirt from the construction site. I remember that smell from my father; I'd smell it every day when he came home from work. It's my brother's business now, he's got his own family now to worry about instead of a little sister. So I'll just sit here at this airport cocktail bar, remembering the days when I'd sit with him in a place like this and I was too young to drink.

God, I want to see my brother walking in to this bar at L 4, ordering a shrimp cocktail. I want to see you, babbling on about a movie you reviewed or a gig your band had. I want something that isn't so foreign, like this bar. Or maybe I want something that isn't so familiar.

I took your picture out of my wallet, the wallet that has so many pictures of men who have come and gone in my life, men who have hurt me, men who I have gone through like... like dish washing liquid, or like something I use all the time and replace all the time and don't think twice about.

I'll just sit here, in this airport, trying to care just the right amount, not too much, but not too little. So I'll just sit here, in this airport cocktail bar, looking at your photo, and wondering if I've done this before.

medication

I

I set my alarm for 4:30 instead of 5:30 so I could roll over, take a pill, and fall back asleep. I'd leave two pills on the night stand with a glass of water every night. I could feel the pain in my leg, my hand, when I reached over to take the drugs. I'd feel it in my back, too. And sometimes in my shoulder. The water always tasted warm and dusty. It hurt to hold the pills in my right hand.

I closed my eyes at 4:32. I hated that damn alarm clock. And taking the pills early still wouldn't make the pain go away before I woke up. I knew that. But I took them anyway. And I tried to fall back asleep. And I dreaded 5:30, when I'd have to move.

5:40, I couldn't wait any longer, I couldn't be late, we couldn't have that, so I'd finally swing my legs to the floor. I'd put on my robe and limp into the kitchen. The trip to the kitchen lasted for hours. And picking up the milk carton from the refrigerator hurt like hell. This wasn't supposed to be happening, not to me. Just pour the damn milk. I'd wipe the tears from my chin and sit down for breakfast.

II

The doctor doubled the dosage, and he was amazed that I needed this much. He told me to follow the directions strictly, STRICTLY. "You can't take these in the morning the way you have been," he'd say. "You have to take them with food." That doesn't help when I'm crying from the pain in the morning. But I could get an ulcer, he'd say. And I wouldn't want that. Of course not. I just wanted the pain to go away.

Take one tablet three times daily, with meals.
Do not drink alcohol while on medication.
Take with food or milk. Do not skip medication.
Do not take aspirin while using this product.
Do not operate heavy machinery. May cause ulcers.

III

All I had to do was get through the mornings. The mornings were the hardest part. Just take a little more pain, and by the afternoon it will all be fine. Just fine.

An hour after the pills, and I'd start to feel dizzy. I'd stare at a computer screen and it would move, in circles, back and forth. I wanted to grab the screen and make it stay in place. But I'd look at my fingers and they would go in and out of focus. I'd feel my head rocking forward and backward; I couldn't hold myself still. I'd sit at my desk and my eyes would open and close, open and close. Before I knew it, ten minutes passed and I remembered nothing. I could have been screaming for ten minutes straight and I wouldn't have known it. Or crying. Or sleeping. Or laughing. Or dying. I had just lost ten minutes of my life, they were just taken away from me, ripped away from me, and I could never get them back.

And I could still feel traces of the pain, lingering in my bones.

IV

I'd sit up at night and just stare at the bottle. It was a big bottle, as if the doctors knew I'd take these drugs forever. Hadn't it been forever already? I'd open a bottle, look at a pill. They looked big too. Pink and white. What pretty colors.

And then I'd think: If one tablet, fifty milligrams, could put me to sleep in the morning, could make me dizzy, could take a part of my life from me, then think about what the other thirty-six could do. 1800 milligrams. It could kill me. I wouldn't want that. Of course not. But just think, the bottle isn't even full.

May cause ulcers. May cause dizziness. Side effects may vary for each patient. May cause weight gain. May cause weight loss. May cause drowsiness. May cause irritability. Medication may have to be taken consistently for weeks before expected results. If effects become severe, consult physician immediately.

V

I began to count. In the mornings I took eight pills: one multivitamin, one calcium pill, one niacin pill, one fish oil capsule, one garlic oil pill, and one pink-and-white pain killer that I was special to have, because you need a doctor's permission to take those. Then I took diet pills: one starch blocker, one that was called a "fat magnet." As if the diet pills worked anyway. But I still took them.

And then I had to watch the clock, take a pink-and-white at one in the afternoon, a different pill at five o'clock, another pink-and-white at six o'clock, and there was also usually sinus medication that I had to take every six hours in there, too. Or was it eight hours? I started to watch the clock all the time, I bought a pill container for my purse so that I would always have my medication with me.

When I'd feel my body start to ache again, I'd look at the clock. It would be fifteen minutes before I had to take another pill.

Right There, By Your Heart

I

i had a dream the other night that i was in a bathroom, sitting on the toilet seat, i think it was the one in florida, but it could have been anywhere. it was a small bathroom. i was stretched over this seat, and i think the lid was up. i was naked. there was a wall right next to me, and i felt cramped, like i couldn't move. and then kurt was there, with me, in the bathroom, naked, standing over me, screwing me. i was sitting on a toilet seat and he was fucking me, and in the entire dream i couldn't get comfortable, i felt very awkward, it felt like he was pressing on my chest, i couldn't breathe, it felt like there was a rock in my stomach that would stay there forever, but the entire time i didn't complain.

II

have you ever had that feeling before, you know, the one when someone is telling you something you don't want to hear, like if someone was about to tell you that someone died and you knew what they were going to say and you still didn't want to hear it, or if someone did something to you you didn't like, like when you were little and the kids at the bus stop shot pebbles and spit balls at you every day because you were smart and you still had to go to the bus stop every morning and just try to ignore them? and when that happens it feels like a medium sized rock just fell into the bottom of your stomach, and you don't want to move because you're afraid that the rock will hurt the inside of your stomach and so you just have to sit there and hope the rock goes away? or else you get the feeling

in your chest, right between your lungs, it feels like someone is pressing against the bone there, right there by your heart, and you've got to breathe, you're not going to be able to take that pressure, that force any longer?

III

it had already been a long day, sitting in the back of someone else's car for two and a half hours, knowing that if elaine's dad wasn't such a slow driver it would have taken less than two hours. I was trying to get home so i could make it on time for the christmas party but still have enough time to pack for my early flight the next morning. airports have become a second home to me. so i walked in through the melon doors only three hours late, those melon doors that scream of the perfect fifties home, of the perfect fifties family that everyone believed we were. i walked through the doors, sarah hugged me, and dad walked into the hallway from the kitchen. wait a minute. he was supposed to be on the other side of the country... well, don't ask questions, just act happy to see him. so i smiled and laughed, until he hugged me. then the rock settled in. he didn't have to say a word. my mind started going through the checklist: okay, what would have brought him back here? who was the one who had died? i said 'grandma' before he did. i cried for fifteen minutes, wiped the tears from my neck, my ears, and i got ready for the party, trying not to move too quickly, so not to disturb the rock.

IV

i got the mail, like i do any other day, and by then i had almost forgotten about waiting for the test results. i was just getting the mail, like normal. when i saw the letter from the hospital that day in that little metal box the pressure on my chest came rushing back like wind when it rushes around the side of a building and it takes you entirely by surprise and you lose your

breath trying to live through it. what if the test results said i was sick, and i wasn't going to get any better? i had too many symptoms, the results had to show something. something, damnit. maybe if i never opened the letter, i'd never have to deal with illness. maybe then i'd live forever. but i opened the letter. it said the doctors still know nothing. i just wanted to know what was wrong with me. why i wasn't perfect. the pressure on my chest didn't go away when i threw the envelope on the ground by the mailbox. i walked upstairs.

V

i needed to talk to someone, so i threw my bathrobe on the floor, pulled on some sweats, and walked over to his apartment. steve was supposed to be coming home from work soon, and i needed to talk to somebody, i couldn't keep everything bottled in. i must have looked like an idiot standing on his stairs looking like i was about to cry. i felt like an idiot there, too, not knowing why the rock in my stomach wasn't going away. i wanted to ask him if he ever felt that rock, felt that pressure, even if there didn't seem to be a reason for it at all except for maybe life itself, which everyone was supposed to manage through anyway, i mean, everyone has stress, what's your problem if you can't take it? i wanted to figure it out, whatever the hell it was that was bothering me, i really wanted to. this panic was driving me crazy, and i couldn't even explain why i was panicked in the first place. i didn't tell him i wanted to light a candle and some incense and just curl up in the corner of my bed, holding one of my pillows, probably the black one, and cry for a very long time. i sat there in his apartment when he got home, but i didn't speak. what could i say? that the rock in my stomach wasn't going away?

VI

i don't know how many times the idea of seeing him went through my mind. at least once a week i'd imagine a scene where he'd confront me, and i'd somehow be able to fight him back, to show him that he didn't bother me any more, to show him that the rock wasn't there any more. to somehow be able to prove that i wasn't a victim any more. i was a survivor. that's what they call it now, you see, survivor, because victim sounds too trying for someone who has been raped. so i keep saying i'm over it but i keep imagining mark all over again, not raping me, but following me on the street, coming to my door with flowers, or sending me a valentine. but once, when i saw him walking out of a record store as i was walking in, the rock fell so hard that i thought i was going to be sick right there by the cash register, right there by those metal things at the doorway that beep when you try to take merchandise out of the store, you know what those things are, i just can't think of what they're called. but if i did that, then he'd know he was still winning, to this day. how many years has it been? how many years since he did that to me? how many years since i've been wanting to fight him, since i've been feeling that rock in my god-damned stomach? i managed to hide my face from him in the store so he didn't see me as he walked out. when i saw he was gone, i wondered why i still felt the pressure in my chest. i thought the pressure was going to turn my body inside-out. i reached for my heart, grabbed at my shirt. maybe the pain was always there, right there, by my heart, but i try not to think of it until i go through times like those.

somebody say something

janet kuypers

jkuypers@scars.tv

<http://www.janetkuypers.com>

scars 

Editor@scars.tv

<http://scars.tv>

Freedom & Strength Press



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