I glanced over my shoulder to see if they were coming. It was a pleasant day—a little too hot, at least for my taste, but otherwise the blue sky and milky clouds made a perfect day for a sun-lover. The group was lingering at the statues, black and dark green sculptures of brilliant people doing very important things. What, we couldn’t be sure, but they were obviously very important.

The ivy hung on the tall sandstone arch, a clock peeking out of the green. Again, I turned to see if my peers were following, and they were, reluctantly. I quickened my pace, anxious to see the place. It had only been a year, but it felt like much longer.

I bent over and rested my hand on the sun-baked ground. It was too hot to take off my sandals and feel the hardened grains against my toes, but at least I was there. I stepped onto the hard, man-fashioned nature and raised my eyes to heaven. Everything was still there—the palm trees with their sometimes-dangling leaves. The old buildings, all created with the same sandy brick, surrounding the area. The darkened star in the heart of the ground. But mostly, the church was the same. The gold-plated surface shone, not like it did at night, but in its own daytime way. I always thought it so ironic that the soul of such a liberal university was this cross-topped chapel in memory of Christ and those who would never forget him. *I never got to go in there*, I thought. *I always wanted to, but I never did.*
ORANGES GO TO THE OPERA

Go back and tie your hair, said my mother, and Why is your mouth all green?
Rob Roy, he pulled some clover, as we crossed the field, I told her.
--May Swenson

That carpet always reminded me of very soft, very white corn-on-the-cob that had been scraped off, perfectly intact, and laid on the ground where I would sit and watch TV in the morning before I went to school. Mom would come in and bring me breakfast and I would watch Dennis the Menace or Gem and the Rockers or, on that day, Sesame Street.

Shoshermosher was with me then, watching Sesame Street, eating breakfast in the living room. We sat there, our trays of Cream of Wheat in front of us. Occasionally when Shoshermosher joined the family, I had to remind someone that they were sitting on him and would they please move because he didn’t appreciate it. They were always very kind to give him his space.

So Shoshermosher and I sat there, eating our cereal and drinking our orange juice when suddenly, something I’d never seen before happened. A song, kind of like the ones Dad listens to when he’s working hard in his office, came on and the screen went to a dark blue, like the color of the ocean in Hawaii. I poked Shoshermosher in the ribs and told him to watch carefully.

The oranges rolled out of the bowl to the strong beat of the music. Their eyes lit up and their lips widened as they sang the song. Their mouths were black inside and their eyes were very blue. I watched, amazed, excited with an energy I can no longer muster. The segment ended and my friend and I went into the kitchen where our bowl of oranges lay.

“Orange,” I said, very softly, in her ear, “you’re going to sing for us now. Please tell the others.” I placed her back in the hole she occupied among her peers and I began to sing the song softly, as if I were reminding them what to do. The oranges remained stationary.
I coaxed, sang, yelled, willed them to move, forced a hole for a mouth with a butter knife, gouged two eyes in hopes that they would magically transform into the smooth blue and white spheres on the TV. But they didn’t; they didn’t sing, they didn’t dance, they didn’t grow eyelashes, they didn’t move. I began to cry.

Mom walked into the room and saw me sitting there, bits of orange scattered about the kitchen, a knife to the side of my pathetic heap of crying child. She began to laugh.

“What’s wrong?” she asked, in humored tenderness.

“The oranges don’t sing!” I wailed, unable to control the frustration and disenchantment I felt.

“No, no, oranges don’t sing.”

“But they did on Sesame!”

“But not everything that happens on TV is real,” she said, holding me close, smelling as only a mama can. If that’s not real I thought then nothing I imagine is real. I nuzzled close to her so I could feel her heart beating in her baby-powder breast. It felt as if I belonged there, as if I were some soft object temporarily removed from my life-source, like there was a little hole just waiting for me to curl into and to rest. And she held me and I snuggled closer to her and breathed in her smell as she rocked me back and forth and kissed the crown of my head, where Daddy said my goldilocks grew.

LITTLE WHITE GHOSTS

The innocent and the beautiful
Have no enemy but time.
--William Butler Yeats

That morning, I laid in bed for a long time. It was one of those mornings where you stare out the window, curled warm in your bed, watching the gold leaves and red leaves and sometimes purple leaves blow in the crisp autumn breeze and shiver to the ground. You’re content on those mornings. Your cheeks are rosy with sleep and with the warmth of your bed and the briskness outside.

It was just us that weekend. Dad was out of town and nobody else lived at home. That’s what happens when you’re the baby or the accident or both. The night before, we had grilled-cheese sandwiches, my favorite.
We went to Salt Lake one night and shopped and slept in the Marriott and had dessert in bed while we watched old movies. Although I had plenty of friends down the street, Mom was always my best friend.

I slipped my feet onto the cold wooden floor and it creaked. When I was little, I hated when it creaked because I thought ghosts were in the floor and if the boards ached too much, the spirits would come out and grab my toes. But one day, the ghosts left, as it was the day I realized ghosts really don’t live in floorboards and that girls who think so are silly.

The kitchen was even colder than my bedroom. I hopped across the linoleum as fast as I could so my toes wouldn’t freeze off and I wouldn’t be tempted back to the warm comfort of my bed. I sat on the stool and ate a little container of yogurt as the leaves swirled down and the sun began her eternal mission of heating up the world.

I was so clever. I made a ghost out of a handkerchief, complete with eyes and a mouth. I hooked him up to the front door so that when people came and we opened it up, the ghost would rise because of the string attached to his head. I stopped at the door and admired my creation, testing it a few times to make sure it still worked.

It was so quiet. I should watch General Conference, I thought. I turned on the television and found those boring old men talking in their boring old voices and realized I didn’t want to experience that pain alone. Someone had to watch it with me.

The carpet was warmer than the wood or the linoleum. It was thick and green and my feet always got lost in it. I opened their door and stepped inside to where she had fallen out of bed. I began to laugh at the idea of a grown woman falling out of bed, so I called my friend right there to tell her the news. But Stacey’s mom wouldn’t let her talk because she had to watch conference. How boring.

“Mom,” I whispered, not wanting to startle her. I always hated it when I woke her up and she screamed three feet in the air. There was no reply.

“Mama,” I said a little louder. I nudged her, but she remained in the same place. I pushed and she lay still. I pounded and it echoed emptiness all through me.

“No no no no no no!” I screamed, pushing, pulling, beating, hoping.
The house was full of people and I sat. Sat on the floor, on the thick green carpet, right next to the white corn-on-the-cob. People kept asking me where my dad was and I didn’t know, so I didn’t say anything. I just sat there. Sat there and stared at my little white ghost that had fallen off its hook and now was lying in a misshapen heap at the bottom of the door.

PAPA KELSEY AND FRIENDS

Look at that ugly dead mask here and do not forget it. It is a chalk mask with dead dry poison behind it, like a death angel. It is…what I never want to be again.

--Sylvia Plath

I needed to leave early that night and Jody really didn’t seem to care. In fact, no one really seemed to care. I had it on the schedule forever that I was supposed to leave first, but Shelly had a date, so you know, that’s more important than me getting sleep so I could go to that stupid debate camp in California with Patrick who was mad at me anyway. When your best friend hates you and you have to spend the next month with them because they’re the only person you know, well, I guess it just sucks.

“Kate, you need to clean the bathroom,” Jody bossed.

“Jody, I need to leave.”

“Kate, you need to clean the bathroom.”

I glared at her and picked up my disinfectant and wash rag and walked into the gross bathroom. That whole place was so disgusting. Henry didn’t even know the walls in the freezer were white until Brittany scrubbed them when she was bored one day. Even “washing the dishes” was a very relative term. If “washing” meant dipping a dirty plate into pepperoni and mushroom tomato water and wiping it dry with a dingy rag, then I suppose you could say we washed dishes at Papa Kelsey’s.

The bathrooms always smelled. I think it’s because they didn’t have any windows or anything. I hate this, I thought as a squirted Pretty Potty around the cold ceramic bowl and sprayed the mirrors with generic orange glass cleaner. I hate this and I hate debate and I basically hate people and if hope is dead, why am I even alive? everything is dead dead dead. I scrubbed harder and fought back the tears.
I pulled off my apron and dumped the cleaning supplies into the closet. I didn’t even say goodbye to anyone, just got in my car and drove off. Never wanted to see that place again, Papa Kelsey’s and Henry. No more dirty dishes or dirty toilets or dirty kids or country music that the dirty girls in the day listened to.

I pulled into the driveway to see his car there. He was inside the car, of course, because Dad would never let him in. I thought of hiding, but he’d seen me and I’d seen him and there was no getting out of it. He flashed on his lights and I kept the doors locked.

“What do you want?” I asked when he stopped by my window.

“I wanted to say goodbye,” he said.

“Oh.” We sat there and breathed. The only reason I noticed was because his breath smelled so bad, like there was something rotting inside him and it came out when he spoke or breathed or even processed a thought. When you walked into a room, you could tell he was there just by his breath. *I bet it’s his decaying conscience,* I thought, with a bitter laugh at my witty and careful humor. I hated him.

“I’m going to bed because I have to leave very early in the morning.”

“I’m going to write you every day,” he reminded me.

“Oh.” I didn’t know how, or if I wanted to, or if I could tell him that I hated him, that he scared me, that he smelled bad, that I didn’t want him to leave flowers in my car, that the idea of him being a pervert and me being the object of his “affections” made me want to kill him or me or someone. I was too weak and he knew it. He knew my weaknesses and I was too tired to deny him access to them. *When I become the first victim of Unabomber II, they’ll know I was right, that he really was crazy,* I thought.

As I sat there, watching David Letterman, hating Eric, the doorbell rang. Emily and Brittany walked in, carrying a small bag of things to keep me entertained at Stanford. *Seventeen,* Diet Coke, Red Vines, crossword puzzles, and a picture of them for when I got lonely. I told them thank you and that I had to go to bed because I had to get up very early, so they went home. After walking them to the door, I leaned my head against the cool glass and thought for a moment. I then decided I hated thinking, so I went back to David Letterman and drank the Diet Coke, determining how much I didn’t really care if I ever saw them again or not.
And I, infinitesimal being,
drunk with the great starry
void,
likeness, image of
mystery,
I felt myself a pure part
of the abyss,
I wheeled with the stars,
my heart broke free on the open sky.

--Pablo Neruda

It was our last night together and it was after hours. Susan had the Oreos and I had the mace. We crept, dressed in black, to the place where so many nights were spent, talking, whispering, crying, thinking. We shared everything there, lying in the center, the remains of day warming our shivering bodies. Once when we were there, Susan told me an old Chinese proverb that said something like, “A girl becomes a woman when she loses her mother.”

“Nine is a pretty young age to become a woman,” I spat.

“Maybe that’s why you’re so sad,” she replied.

I suppose it was something to think about.

We stepped from the ivy-covered arches onto the vast surface. When I was first at Stanford, that place scared me, especially when the sun reflected off the blank surface of the ground. But now it was my place. Funny how the things that scare you often are the things that mean the most to you.

Stars, like perfect diamonds, crept out of the thick, black, velvet-lined sky. We slipped off our shoes and felt the day-baked warmth seep into our feet and give us the energy to do this one last time.

The quad was empty. Good. It was so big, so bare, and yet so perfect. We walked to the dead-center star and laid there, the warmth now soaking into our entire bodies. I tipped back my head to see freckle-like stars dotting the night’s face between the upside-down palm trees. Oh Lord, my God when I in awesome wonder Consider all the worlds Thy hands have made...I gasped at the spinning night, wishing I could somehow spin with it. I wished to be one of the stars, faithful and white, but I knew it must be a cold and lonely job, being a star.
Light from both the moon and man shined on the golden church, giving it a holy glow. Paintings of Christ and those he served in muted tones covered the simple sandstone building, illuminated by the seemingly magical light. I want to go in there. I always wanted to. But I never did. The trees swayed in a summer breeze because it was one of those nights where summer breezes blow and you hold hands with someone you love and eat cold and ripe watermelon, just sitting there, watching the stars and the life blow by. How that reflects me...always wanted to, never did. I dreamed with a childlike innocence of coming back here to think and to hope. Especially of things I thought were gone.

**HAVE FUN, GO MAD**

Of course he wasn’t dead. He could never be dead until she herself had finished feeling and thinking. The kiss of his memory made pictures of love and light against the wall. Here was peace…She called in her soul to come and see.

--Zora Neale Hurston

“Are you sure you’re okay riding the Metro alone?” Carl asked as we stood at the electronic gate. I nodded uncertainly, but certain I needed to go.

“Kay. Be safe.” My brother-in-law hugged me. “There’s your train. Run, Lousy Housepet!” I inserted my ticket into the machine and ran through the turnstile and up the escalator. I felt so free, riding an underground train all over a mysterious city to meet a boy, that boy.

I sat next to the window, pulling out a book to look busy and avoid talking to strangers. A man sat next to me, sipping his brown bag and swatting at imaginary flies. I scooted a little closer to the window, my heart pounding at this terrifyingly exciting emancipation I was finally experiencing. Finally. Brave enough. Finally. Strong enough. Finally. Alive enough. I grinned at the possibilities.

* * *
I am so stupid! I thought as I wandered around Union Station, gazing at the vaulted, golden ceilings and the hordes of people, wondering how I’d ever find him. Gum. I need gum. I stepped into a little drugstore and purchased a ridiculously-priced pack of green Extra when I saw him in the corner of my eye.

“Kate Randle!” he said.

“Jonathan Dunn!” I replied.

“You look great!” My breath caught.

“So do you...” And he did. Oh, do you know I’ve been in love with you for the last two years?

“Georgetown?” he suggested.

“Sure,” I answered, clueless about what or where Georgetown was.

The train was crowded. “Hold my hand,” he said. “I don’t want to lose you.” Me, neither...

We rose into the pervasive mugginess unique to D.C. I looked around at the little trendy shops and cafes and palm-reading holes-in-the-wall. Bikers with important destinations flew by on the cobblestone streets while live guitars imitated Dave Matthews and the Indigo Girls and steel drums sang Bob Marley. Thai, French, Italian, anything but hamburgers drifted from their cubbies on the crowded street and mixed in the air for a smorgasbord of garlicky sweetness and spices.

“You know,” Jon said with a mouthful of turkey tortilla wrap, “I was here the other day and had lunch at the table across from Michael Stipe of R.E.M. Didn’t I, Sabor?” Jon raised his voice so the owner could hear him.

“Yes, Jonny,” the old man said.

“Do you like R.E.M., Sabor?”

“Don’t know who the man was when he asked me if I like an autographed picture, and still don’t.” Jon turned back to me.

“You like ice cream?” he asked.

“No, I think it’s sick.”

“There’s a Ben & Jerry’s down the street a little ways.”
And so we stepped again into the stifling mugginess of the June Georgetown day, but I don’t think I noticed. Four hours of Mint Chocolate Cookie for me and Heath Toffee Crunch for him combined with smart talk and his beautiful eyes and smile cooled it to a smooth, clear day when the sun begins to think of warming the world again like when you’re alone in a canyon, watching pink and mint-green buds poke themselves bravely out of the hard branches, later to flourish into strong and resilient life-sources.

* * *

“Like poetry?” he asked outside Barnes and Noble.

The day was maturing to ripeness, fed by good company and a contented peace. I was happy with our day. The floor of that section was hard and smelled of new books, woody and crisp. John Donne, Neruda, Yeats, and cummings spilled onto the wooden floor, held in by the natural books, allowing us to absorb them, to think and drink the wonders of the wordcrafters.

The day was ending and the lights outside the bookstore were sinking into pinks and oranges. We headed into the subway station.

“I want to make sure you get onto your train safely,” he said as we stepped onto the platform at Union Station.

“Don’t trust my sense of direction, eh?” I asked.

“Actually, no I don’t.” His smile twinkled and we made our way through the crowded underground.

“Here it is,” he said, turning to the tracks.

“I guess.”

“Call me?” he asked.

“You’re going to college. I’ll be a senior in high school.” I replied.

“I’ll be in Utah for awhile,” he answered.

“Kay,” I said.
He touched my arm and I looked at him. That amazing grin sparked again and he opened his arms. As he held me, he whispered, “Thank you for most this amazing day.” The doors opened and I turned one last time. He blew me a kiss and waved. *Oh, how much I’ve changed in a year*, I thought. That freedom grin slipped its way onto my mouth again and I blew one back.

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…I come into the presence of still water.
And I feel above me the day-blind stars
waiting for their light. For a time
I rest in the grace of the world, and am free.
--Wendell Berry

I realized I was standing alone and looked behind again to see if my friends were coming. They weren’t. The palms swayed and the heat rose from the surface of the ground. Bravely, I ripped off my sandals and popped across the heated stone. The door to the church was open. I peered inside and saw Mr. Hoyt and the other science students drinking the cherubic paintings and the brown and glossy pews. The wooden door was heavy and it was old, but I pushed it with my little strength and stepped into the cool, dark chapel, the place I’d longed to come, where the shadows of the stained-glass hung like colored ghosts in my painted mind.