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“Close Distance”

Denicia Peterson

Trinity College, denicia.peterson@trincoll.edu

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Last year

If I were to put Georgia into a storybook I'd give her the name *Désolé*, the French term for sorry. And every time she starts crying I will say her name and cradle her like an apology. When Georgia cries her breath heaves as if she has been running for too long. Sometimes I listen to her as she sleeps. She tells me things that she would never tell me sober.

The next morning she awakens and tumbles over to kiss me. When her lips pause on mine to take a breath, I inhale her secrets into my lungs and store them in the spaces between my ribs. She leaves the bed to smoke a cigarette. The air she has left behind weighs heavily on the mattress. I can see the imprint of her body in the empty space beside me. When she comes back, her skin is cold and her dreads smell like Marlboro. She sits cross-legged on the bed facing me. “Tell me a story,” she says.

I tell her the story of my mother, who traveled up and down poles in bars and taverns and my father, who spends more money on beer than he does on anything else and my brother, who has half my blood and half the blood of a Russian prostitute.

While I talk, Georgia tilts her head upwards. Her eyes roam our bedroom ceiling like a nomad. I know little things. Like the way she measures out 1 teaspoon of brown sugar, whisking her finger across the top to scrape off the extra heaping. I know the way she closes her eyes when she talks to her mother on the phone, the pitter patter of her fingernails on the desk as she listens to the radio.

Georgia fingers the watch on her hand. She tells me of time. Five pm last year on this exact same day she was throwing my mother's champagne glasses at the wall while I recited spoken word in an attempt to calm her down. Georgia once dressed up in her father's plaid shirt and sat outside on a street corner near Maple and West 4th with an old snapback perched in front of her. She made twelve dollars

and fifty cents that day and spent it all on three sweaters from our neighborhood thrift shop.

Georgia once told me that she found her adoption letters locked in her father's gun safe when she was fifteen. She wonders when they're going to tell her. I wonder why she opened the box in the first place.

She looks at me, and I instinctively turn around to look behind me. When I turn around, her eyes are closed.

"Tell me something."

I am running out of things to tell her. I reach over and pull her down onto the bed with me. Her head rests on top of my stomach.

The next morning I wake up. My stomach is burning from the fire of her heat. I follow the smoke into the kitchen.

"What do you want to accomplish in life?" she asks me.

"I don't know. All the normal stuff," she sits down at the island.

"Go ahead."

I laugh. "Babe."

She looks at me. Smiles.

"I want to accomplish something good."

"Why not great?" She is on a roll.

"Good/great. It doesn't matter."

"If it doesn't matter why didn't you say great?"

"There are things we know by heart, and things we don't." I say pompously, quoting one of my favorite poets.

"There are shoulds. There are musts. One does not partake in activities that are not in alignment with their identity."

I do not know where this quotation is from or how it relates.

"No open heart. No broken heart. No one gets in; no one walks out."

"I want the part of you that you refuse to give." She looks at me and smiles sadly.

"Ever want something, and the more you know you can't have it, the more you want it?"

"Find what you love and let it kill you."

She is trying to tell me something. I am not listening.

Present year

Before I am fully awake my fingers are groping the empty space in the bed beside me. When I awaken I flip the page and add another tally mark to the notepad on my nightstand. There are too many days to count. The day Georgia left, she left me a note on the island in the kitchen, in front of the chair she always sat in. Today, when I walk into

the kitchen I see a woman reaching up on her tippy toes to pull down two coffee mugs from the cupboard. When I first met her, I thought she looked like Georgia. Now, I am not so sure. I am forgetting what Georgia looks like.

The woman is engrossed in her coffee making. I make my presence known and she receives me with a smile. I sit down and wait in silence as she finishes. She hands me the cup and we make small talk. Yes, I slept well. I'm not sure. The news said yesterday that the subways were going to be delayed but I don't know when. Did you hear anything new? No I was just curious. Of course I'm happy with you. Yesterday? I didn't say anything to you yesterday. I did not drink the entire bottle of Bailey's; it wasn't even full to begin with. Maldita sea! Fucking coño will you just stop?

I look at her and wonder how we ended up here. She shakes her head back and forth and I remember when I walked in on Georgia banging her head on the bathroom sink.

“I have a headache,” she had told me, by way of explanation. Her father taught her to always fight fire with fire.

My face drops as I look into my coffee cup and my hair frames the side of my face like a weeping willow tree. The woman stares at me. I think that her eyes look like Georgia's before she starts to cry, but I am not sure. I am forgetting what Georgia looks like.

I get up and leave the room, leaving my coffee cup on the counter. My feet tingle from the cold and my toes go numb on the short walk from the kitchen to the bedroom. I sit on the bed and listen to the woman wash the wares. After about ten minutes there is no sound. Then the television comes on. The newscaster is predicting tonight's Emmy nominations. When Georgia's first pair of glasses came, the Emmy's was playing. She held the box on her lap until the commercial break before opening the box and taking out the glasses. She had turned them over and over in her hand before putting them on. The glasses seemed to cover her entire face. She searched the entire room with her new glasses before hooking her index finger in the bridge and sliding it off, the temples folding inwards like firmly crossed arms.

“What's wrong?” I had asked.

She paused for a second. “I wonder whose eyes I'm looking through now.”

“What?” I was thoroughly confused.

“I’m not looking through my eyes any more. I’m wearing glasses. Whose eyes are these? Everyone wearing glasses, whose eyes are they looking through? There are some people who never see the world through their own eyes. If I don’t wear these glasses, then I won’t be able to see things that are far away but what if I’m not meant to see things that are far away? What if I’m supposed to go up to faraway things in order to see them? You know what I mean?”

I looked at her in confused understanding and laugh. She is vulnerable, sitting cross-legged on the couch rambling, convinced that she will somehow disrupt the balance of the universe if she wears the glasses.

I hear heavy footsteps and all too suddenly the woman is standing in front of me.

“I’m sorry,” she says.

I do not look at her, but from the corner of my eye I can see her looking at me. Her lips part slightly; she is on the verge of another sentence. Her lips close and her chest rises. A puff escapes her lips. I want to take her into my arms like I once did Georgia but my body does not move. I am a victim of excess marijuana. When she leaves I close the bedroom door and head to the dresser, pulling open the top drawer. I know where the envelope is by heart. I stand there in front of the dresser holding the envelope. I want to smell it again but I think that I have inhaled all of Georgia’s scent from the envelope. I take out Georgia’s letter and run my hand over the ink. It has not yet begun to fade. I close my eyes and prepare myself to read it.

I have not yet finished reading the entire note when I realize that I am crying. This is the first time that I have cried since Georgia left. Three days after she left I got a call from my uncle, who worked at the police station. I didn’t say anything when I picked up the phone. Neither did he. I already knew and somehow, he already knew that I knew. When I turned on the television that night, blurry phone footage of a woman jumping off of the bridge was on repeat. Georgia wasn’t wearing her glasses. She wanted to see the world up close.