

Sorry Jacob

On the question about God, I could maybe do better.

Tonight, like always, Grand's old mastiff breathes heavy, unless I set the AC to 67. I'm cold and wide awake but I'm determined to rest in my bed, regardless of sleep coming or not. I wonder, once again, what quiet sounds like because my head is a constant rattle of noise. Most times the sound puts me in mind of howling wind, sometimes it's like shoes shuffling down a long, linoleum hallway. This irritant head-noise started after Grand was swept away. I say irritant, rather than God-damned nightmare, to downplay its power over me, but it's a god-damned nightmare, is what it is.

After Grand's private memorial service, I road-tripped solo to the Grand Canyon, the place my wife apparently was conceived. I should back up...the memorial was me and an altar. No body. No mourners. Just me. I wasn't welcome at the service her parents organized. No surprise there. F-them. Grand's mother never liked me. Didn't matter I make as much as lots of them lawyers. She sees my hardhat and I'm scum. Sure, she was civil when Grand was alive, but I could see through that tight smile. Scary bleached white teeth, like headlight coming at you on a dark night.

Anyway, the altar was Grand's, and I still haven't got rid of it, even though it's just a cardboard box under a flowery scarf. It sits by the window, on top of the dresser. It's got rocks, and a crystal ball, dried flowers, candles, and some other trinkety stuff. Anyways, I put Grand's smiling picture on the altar and played her annoying country music. Then I said a prayer that God forgives people who jump from Caribbean cruises on their wedding anniversaries. Right after my praying, the head-noise starts. That shuffling-feet noise had me hunting around the

house for an hour, looking for whatever rodent might of squeezed in. Dog didn't hear nothing. But I figured out it was all in my head when the wind crept into my ears and began rushing around as if it wants to find a way out but can't.

After weeks of that crap, I didn't have much hope that my head noise would ever stop, but enough hope, I guess, because I gallivanted to a place called Shoshone Point—which is supposed to be a remote part of the Grand Canyon and supposed to be one of the quietest places on earth. I brought one of Grand's rocks along, that amethyst I gave her. But here's the thing, when I got there, I couldn't figure out if the howling wind was all canyon wind, in-my-head wind, or some kind of mix of the two. Point is, all I got was God-damned wind with a scenic view. I tossed that rock into the canyon. Didn't hear it land.

On the drive home, I blasted Grand's music so loud it obliterated the howling. Only thing I heard was Reba and me belting out *Consider me Gone*. The music reminded me of Grand grinning in her sparkly pink cowboy hat, the one we got in Mexico—when she didn't fake her smiles. That's the pic I put on the altar when I said them prayers.

That night, right before she jumped, she says to me, when you get home, tell baby Canyon that Mommy loves him more than anything. Tell him yourself, I said. I kept thinking how this trip was supposed to cheer her up. The doctors sure as shit didn't help her out. Then I see her stand up, see her hair picked up by the wind, splayed out around her face, and all lit up by the moon. And she says, I just can't live like this. Sorry, Jacob. Those were her last words, unless she uttered something else on her way down—only God knows. I sure don't.

Why'd she want me to see her do that? Maybe she was thinking her body would be recovered if I was there to point out where she landed. Sure, Grand, no problem, right after rushing around to find a crew member to inform him my wife just jumped overboard. Right off,

that guy springs into action, calling a Code Oscar over the intercom and he keeps asking me, Where? Where did she go in? Took 23 minutes for the ship to reverse and circle back around, and all this time, I'm trying to mentally hold onto the location of that splash. The crew took turns scanning the ocean all night, crisscrossing the water with their high beams. Nothing but black water.

In the morning, the coast guard searched for another five hours. *MOB*, that's what they called it, man overboard—not recovered. I exited with the coast guard as a person of interest, and the Sea Duchess sailed on.

Most people still think it's somehow my fault, blame me even though the infrared camera videoed her stepping on a lounge chair and lunging over the rail with surprising speed and grace. Barefoot, and in her white gown, she looked like a seagull taking flight. Cameras showed me rushing to the rail and leaning so far over, my feet left the deck. Showed me reaching out and watching Grand fall. Camera couldn't see what I could. Her body bouncing off the ship twice before making a small, silent splash eleven stories below. Video showed it took me just four minutes to find that crew kid in the casino. Does that sound like a guy who wishes his wife were dead? I don't think so.

In the transcripts of the investigation, I read that twerpy crew kid thought I wasn't upset enough for someone whose wife just jumped. Guess he expected more hollering or blubbing while I was trying to get people to save my wife. And some couple next to us at dinner reported that Grand didn't eat nothing at dinner that night, and I drank too much. Sure, three drinks on vacation makes me an alcoholic. Whatever. And, yeah, I admitted to pressuring Grand for sex that day. If trying to kiss your wife and touch her breasts is sexual assault, then call me a sicko. She wasn't interested, so I left her alone, because believe it or not, I'm not a pig. Was I pissy and

pouty? Yup, I was. Didn't talk to her at dinner and apparently imbibed too much for the likes of other folk. But after, I tried to be nice, tried to make her happy.

You know what's funny? That detective asked even me if I believed in God, like he's a priest or something. To which I said, *not particularly at this time*. I mean, who would? That was my wife's thing. She prayed enough for both of us. Didn't do her much good now, did it? Grand's mother said the one thing she knew for sure was her daughter would still be alive if I had taken her to a hospital instead of on a vacation. Know what I think? If her mother had all the answers, why didn't she have Grand committed again. Like it worked the first time, right?

Some mornings, just before I get out of bed, I can see Grand standing at her alter with the sun pushing through the curtain and making her face glow real soft. She props up a picture card against one of those Mexican candles with the saints on them. Then she picks up two rocks and presses them into her fists. She bows her head, kisses her thumbs, and stands there real quiet. When she's done praying, or whatever you call it, she walks to me and holds out her fists. I try to guess which rocks are in her hands. Malachite, amber, topaz, turquoise. Most of the time I'm wrong, which makes her laugh. And then, soon as I smile, Grand dissolves like fog over water.

Tonight, the fan overhead whirls and clinks. It's out of balance. I like its dull, rhythmic clack and try to focus on that sound alone, but the mastiff's struggle to breathe mingles with Baby Canyon's howling. That's how I imagine Grand drowning every night, shivering in the icy cold water, gasping for air, crying out—but I can't save her. And I keep wondering, when did she choose to go with it, to let water take the place of air?

Then I hold on to baby Canyon, and he holds me back.

And God still don't figure in none.