

I've considered ending my life. This is not a sure-fire plan, but there are small moments, when I haven't eaten for days, and I can feel the absence of sugar and caffeine and processed chemicals written on the sides of boxes. In these absences, I start to wander into the grottos of thought. I sat in the waiting room, watching the blue carpet fibers shake in the air-conditioned breeze. When the doctor finally opened the frosted glass door to the office, I felt as though the room was spun on its end, and the furniture re-arranged, and the pictures of his daughter ice fishing was replaced by a picture of his daughter near a small water fall.

“In twenty years, my parents will be in their mid-seventies, I will be fifty, over half a life lived, god willing. I will be closer to death than I am now.” I have that I am fortunate enough to realize that twenty years has gone by in an instant, and that another twenty will feel like switching on a lightbulb in a dim room. It is instant, faint, and a simple moment in a day for everyone.

I said, ‘considering.’ I had to reassure the doctor. This is not to trivialize self-harm, nor to normalize it. But I think these passing thoughts are healthy for humans. Especially, a human like myself. A man. A widower.

My wife is dead, and it is melancholy. It was a year ago next month. She walked out of our house, straight down the edge of the cul-de-sac, past the closed gate of the port. I assumed she pinched herself through the poorly padlocked gate and then flung herself into the Cape Fear River. They found her, wearing the dress I'd purchased on a boys-only-weekend trip for thirty-five dollars. It was a royal blue, almost gown like, with specific threading and lace flowers etched into the hem and neckline. I loved the way she looked in that dress.

She had water in her lungs. As you would expect.

This was the way she wanted to die. She had spoken of it from time to time. I did not heed the warnings closely enough and I just allowed her to rest comfortably on the couch, watching her reality tv. I wanted her to have a moment of respite. “How did she even know the path to the water through the port?” I’ve asked myself at two thirty in the morning. I sat awake and pondered the route. Then, like most nights, I dressed in a lite coat, and pulled on some comfortable walking shoes, and followed my wife. The gate opening was wide, and with enough determination, easy to pass through. She crossed a busy railroad, but that would have been nothing for her runner’s legs. Then the endless maze of shipping containers, but she scaled up one and down the other. Then the port house guard, she somehow evaded, but it’s quite possible he’d been sleeping off a large roast beef sandwich his wife had packed for him. Possibly. I always add that little explanation for myself. Humanizes it a bit more.

Then she followed a winding path of crosswalks, industrial cranes, and large oil pipes, to a desolate, single dock. A remnant from earlier development of the port. A small dock that had been tossed by hurricane waters, sediment buildup, years of abuse, still standing. This was where she left her shoes. This was where they found the photograph of myself, looking at a photograph of her. And she jumped, into frigid water, that locked her joints and muscles and filled her lungs.

“What pushed her to this decision?” Dr. Harold Miles asked me, as he sat gently across the room.

“The death of our son.” I replied. We didn’t have a son. What we did have was seven months of a pregnancy, three weeks hospitalization, and one hour of a cesarean section surgery to remove the still born child. Our son, Gregory Allan Marshburn, after her grandfather. At 6

months of pregnancy, she came home with ten gallons of blue paint. “For the room,” She whispered in my ear. “Every room?” I questioned. “Possibly.”

We’d always wanted a son. That’s the plain matter of it. She was destined to be the mother to my child and I the father to her child. We knew this when we met. From the very first kiss outside the bamboo garden and stone fountain of her parents’ home when we were twenty-one. This was our blessed vocation.

Dr. Harold crossed his legs, and twisted a blue pen in his hand, “conceiving was difficult, you had mentioned earlier last week?”

I rested my eyes for a moment. As I opened them again, the Dr. had his palm nestled under his chin, his blue eyes rested on mine in a questioning manner. I spoke quietly, “Last week was last week? I never used to notice how slow a day can go by. But it was me; I was not fertile. Growing up on the river, near the gypsum factory might have had something to do with it, but I’ll never really know.”

But one day, she was pregnant. We thanked the clouds, we said hello to neighbors, we ate chicken sausage and took a walk downtown.

“You suspected infidelity?”

“No. not once.”

“So, after you returned home from the hospital...”

I walked her gently to the front door, I let her in, she went into the baby’s room and stayed locked in there two days and three nights. I didn’t hear one sound come from behind that door. When she emerged, naked, covered in paint, I saw. She had painted the walls, the ceiling,

the lamp, chairs, closet doors, trim, floorboards, tapestries, potted plants, baby clothes, all of it; blue.

The room stayed that way. The paint dried heavy, sealing items to their surfaces. The books never opened again, the coffee cup was never able to be dumped, the cushion on the chair couldn't be fluffed. The room was suspended.

“A similar blue to the cup your drinking from now, Dr. Harold.”

The doctor paused and glanced at myself and then back to the cup. “This is - this cup is green. Like, a spring leaf on a gum branch tree.”

I wandered the room with my eyes. What other items had deceived me with their colored hue? The couch was a navy blue, this I knew for sure, but the ottoman was such a dark blue it was nearly purple. Harry's tie was blue, with small blue dogs embroidered about it, the rest of his suit, black, and peeking out underneath his trousers were his sky-blue socks. I was sure these items to be true.

“Your suit, what color do you perceive it to be?” Dr. Harold asked me as he furled his brow. “Navy blue”, I replied.

It was my only suit. “In my closet, the clothes have all turned to shades of blue. I have trouble choosing what to wear, so I've been wearing this suit, since I know its color, and this shirt, I know its white.”

Dr. Harold moved the pad of paper to the teal stand next to his chair. He explained his belief of what's happening in my mind, with my eyes, my heart. Any item my mind directly associates with my wife, it manipulates and augments.

“But, doctor...that’s everything in my life.” He realized this notion and explained that I need not to be deceived by my mind’s eye, but a new regiment would be thought of to discipline this phenomenon. No pills, no drugs to treat, just time and more sessions in his office.

I walked home, five miles or so. The sky was a clear blue, and swarm of blue jays peppered the powerlines before Greenfield Lake park. I passed by the Canteen, where she and I would sip beer after beer and kiss under soft glowing lights. I walked and walked until I came upon our home. I hesitated to enter. Instead, I peered into each window, looking at each artifact littered throughout the home. Wingback chairs, light switches, candelabras, record players, picture frames, found paintings, oak wooden desks, boxes of Christmas decorations that have sat for months and months, the ash tray where I kept her last cigarette butt; every item, dripping in blue. I peeked into the baby’s room, the same.

I continued. I walked down the street, past the old homes on Central, down to the edge of the neighborhood, I saw the port. The gate, wide open, the guard house empty. I entered. Several hundred feet, I was greeted by train tracks. I pressed my hand to the rail and felt a soft, gentle whisper of approaching cars. I passed two empty containers, listened to my echo for a moment. I walked a short length of the oil pipe, I scaled up and then down, until I came to the abandoned dock.

I removed my shoes and walked its length, until I came to the edge of the Cape Fear river. This was where she left me. I always imagine how cold she might have been, wearing only that blue dress, and I think about the falling material, catching her legs, suffocating their movement. But I also think about her freezing to death, not drowning, but just slowly slipping away. Delicate as a song.

If someone from the neighborhood was looking out of their back porch, they would have seen a young man barefoot, desperately breathing in cold air between heavy sobs, standing over the bluest water he'd ever seen.