

Antiquated Grandeur

I was seated in one of the farthest corners of the airport's maze, the sign for Boston glowing above me with an eerie red authority. I would be there in less than a few hours, away from this tiny excuse of an airport, away from my allegedly abusive boyfriend, away from the national scandal that had broken over my life, I would be getting away from Charlottesville and I no longer cared how, just that I was going to get away. To be fair, the situation awaiting me in the northern reaches of the nation was not one that posed any real threat to my being, at least not physically the way my relationship had, and not mentally the way the desperate university officials did—blind in their search for justice, they didn't realize I was not a helpless victim of domestic abuse, they only realized that they had failed to help her, and now, as the terrific details of her death unfolded piece by piece above me on CNN, it was too late to avoid the explosion of a national scandal. A television monitor hanging close to the terminal corner into which I had settled rolled constant footage of my neighborhood, the yellow police tape stretched across the perimeter of her apartment complex, the window of my own bedroom visible in the neighboring building on the screen.

The images flashed above me, washing over me, the room where she had died, the door that he had kicked in, the lacrosse portrait she had sat for at the beginning of the latest season. I remember she'd had a slight tweak in her shoulder at the time, a minor field injury unapparent in the angelic depiction of innocent beauty she portrayed for any of the flyers to observe as they trickled past in a steady stream from both ends of the terminal. No emotion flowed through my body, I had stopped feeling anything days before, sometime between my last episode with my

own boyfriend and the administration's attempt to intervene. I had snapped into an emotionless drone of practical reason, tending only to the business at hand, operating strictly by the laws of logical rationale. The details of my pending journey to Boston were irrelevant in my mind, I was getting away, and that was all that mattered.

I dabbed at the scab over my left eye, simply refusing to wince as the sharp pain pierced my temple under the delicate pressure of my fingers. Almost a week old, its tender edges had already hardened to an ugly reminder of the incident, one that was almost completely covered by the wonders of modern makeup, my personal sentiments toward the situation similarly hidden, having already been silenced, forced to stop, settle, and solidify into a tight memory of painful trauma, one that I locked away untouched, unfelt, unexperienced, for yet another day.

The dull aching throb that had been so rhythmically radiating through my head for the past few minutes, few hours, goodness, I guess it had been a few days, quieted momentarily, the looming onslaught of frantic questions finally exploding into the calm, flooding me with the reality I was so intent on leaving behind. Would they follow me? Try to detain me? They'd already tried calling my parents, a lot of good that did them---I'd been sitting there in the Dean's office when she reached my mother, curled up in a fetal position, knees tucked tightly to my chest, my treasured baseball cap nestled snugly over my mass of curls to darken any exposure of my face as her maternal tone rang out over the thick silence blanketing the faintly illuminated quarters.

The surrounding rush of weary travellers droned on as the pounding at my temple lay dormant, my mind kept trying to imagine my mother when she received the phone call, her feeble body

hunched over the office desk, slumping in dismay as she heard the hollow voice of her daughter so faint and unfamiliar, far away out of her reach, I'm okay mom, I'm okay. The image gnawed at me, wrenching mercilessly inside my gut. I refused to let my mind pursue the vision of her defeated figure further, pushing my focus instead to my memory of the scene at the other end of the phone call. I had been perched in the seat of a rich leather chair, sunk as deeply against its tall back as my contorted body could muster, arms clasped tightly around my bent knees, hugging them with the tiny bit of intensity left lingering in my limbs. In the dim light of the office the bruising was only faintly apparent, the swollen protrusion that had pooled at the base of my jaw's left side, however, was a clear and undeniably grotesque reminder of the violence I had provoked. I don't think the dean knew what to do with me. In an unbelievably poor coincidence of time, I sat there before her, having sustained obvious physical injuries as she explained to my mother, the same morning that Yeardeley's death reached the world.

I had been sent to her by a fellow dean, one who happened to also be a professor of mine and the only person to whom I had allowed the exposure of my stark situation, at that point having emotionally detached, reverting to business mode, simply acting according to the duties my logical reasoning presented in accomplishing my given task of completing the semester. I had e-mailed my professor a photo of my injuries to explain my accompanying request for an extension of my final paper's deadline, citing, as the official reason, the pounding headache splitting my brain as grounds for a day's addition in time allowance. I would have stopped by her office on my way to the library that morning, but time was precious and I saw no need in wasting more than was absolutely necessary.

About a week before my request, this particular episode of domestic discord had occurred. He had come home from work, some inadvertent remark had landed poorly, a typical bout of rage ensued, an equally passionate anger eventually rising in us both, and, this time, the scene culminated after I threw a bowl against the wall of the kitchen, the shattered remnants raining over the clean grey slates covering the floor as he lunged towards me in an attempt to restrain my hands from reaching for the next porcelain piece to launch as a weapon. Flailing into a frenzied tangle of my own limbs, I heaved myself away from his reach, swooping around and slamming my head into the edge of the nearby door frame, my momentum ricocheting, sending me teetering sideways into the bathroom. Stunned by the furious intensity of the impact, I lost my footing and surrendered to the blows acting against my beaten body, a weightless ragdoll at the mercy of a violent collision of opposing centripetal forces. In slow motion my body went down, knees hitting first, pulling the rest of my body with them, yanking my head down to connect with the smooth rim of the toilet jutting out from the wall, my jaw catching the shock as I crumpled into a tiny heap against the cold tile, motionless, silent. I didn't move.

He never laid a hand on me. But try explaining that to a group of greedy vultures intent on seeking justice. The legal team that had assembled following my meeting with the dean, a stoic group of detectives, administrators, and a few other members of the university and local policing forces, saw my injuries and, given the current heart wrenching events dominating all the national news feeds, jumped on the opportunity to right a wrong these various authorities had previously overlooked. They had, upon more than one occasion, been presented with evidence that a male member of the lacrosse team, the son of one of their own among the elitest ranks of southern aristocracy, posed a serious threat to the reputation of the university and the athletic program as a

whole. Involved in numerous alcohol-related incidences, he had been flagged by peers and a few sports officiates as a potential danger, one that, given no threat of consequence, would most assuredly bring inevitable harm to someone unfortunate enough to be caught in the path of his destructive inebriations. And it was harm that he had finally brought.

His unruly antics had escalated into the very worst of unlikely circumstances, it had been officially determined that he had killed a beloved member of the university community and fellow lacrosse star, his girlfriend, Yeardeley Reynolds Love. At precisely 12:08 p.m. on May 3, 2010 the Charlottesville police issued the press release, he was charged with first-degree murder and was being held at the Albemarle Charlottesville Regional Jail. It was estimated that her death, formally declared a result of blunt force trauma to the head, to have occurred around 2:30 a.m., her frail body carried away hours later in a body bag, the administration left with one nasty mess of a media swarm. And then I fell into their laps.

An apparent victim of domestic violence, the legal team pushed and pressured with every tactic they could imagine. If I would just agree to press charges, he would be punished, I would be safe, the whole ordeal would be over. I refused. After hours of questioning, interrogating, threatening, their scare tactics failed, I would not press charges or seek a temporary protective order. I wasn't in danger and I wasn't a victim. I really don't think they knew what to do with me. So, they put me in a hotel while I finished my exams. With a plain clothed detective available as an escort, I was kept under close watch. It lasted a day, maybe two, before I silently bowed out. Exams were forgotten, classes were no longer relevant. A single text message was all

it took. “How about that trip” I sent the man in Boston. Within minutes the flight was booked and I simply walked out of the hotel, past my friendly escort, into an awaiting cab.

I steered my thoughts to the retreat that awaited me, the flight would be boarding any minute, if only I could keep my thoughts at bay until then, I would be safe, safe and away. Just as I reached for my headphones to deafen the incessant roar of the memory, the pounding resumed at my temple and I settled back into the searing ache, smiling with exhausted content at the relief. Thank god, I thought, as the memory disappeared into the screaming agony resonating through my brain.
