

Depth Perception

Grandma Nelson always tells the story of losing her eye with a drawl—an alchemy of Kentucky farm and Depression: one part dust, dash of chicken coup, under hot sun reddening necks, half past hours of 10 hungry siblings. The drawl is power for the Apothecary purling the truth better than the stick from her eye.

Her Californian grandchildren come from a land where they all sound like newscasters. They have the absence of drawl; of cymbal & jingle. A list of clever right after the other, their deep thoughts come from the sound of their pinched noses, a perfect like a hint of hysterectomy, a door their names don't have to lock.

The Grandchildren are no match for the story of what became of her eye, her voice a soothsayer's fist full of candy, her eye a thick, foggy film. A twist of scar tissue like watered down milk. Sometimes it shakes a little, afraid to say *No*. A shy eye. It is easy to lock the Grandchildren's doors, to tell them Bad Eyes come from sorry brothers who play with sticks pretending they're air planes.

In Indiana, however, her drawl begets the others, a kind of omnibus of accent cooling in the air conditioning, curdling in the humidity. In Indiana, Sisters tell Grandchildren new stories in which big sisters who pick on little brothers get their eyes poked out with sticks. There are no shy eyes in Indiana, no accidents or depth perception, only loosed lipped sisters and sycamore sticks.

Grandma & her all Good Eye have a lot in common, carrying around their twin's corpse. If the seeing eye had a voice, it would choose to tell its stories with a southern accent all its life. And in California, we are all listening, we are all learning as the eye looks, blind, like sometimes the truth.

Risky Art

Dear Brother,

Thank you for the email informing me about the secret government bunker under the Denver International Airport. When Rob, your pet snake, died, you put him in a baggy and tossed him in the dumpster. Life is like the dead Gardner snake you put in a Ziploc baggie and tossed in the dumpster, like smuggled porn under grandma's radar. Yes, if I had a vagina, I'd shoot myself too. America is beautiful, Dan. I am sure America, too, wonders what happened to itself. Mom called: she wants to know if I've met any of your girlfriends. How many beers does it take to move unpredictable like that, to crook/headlock mom's neck and call it a hug? What would it have been like to die of the worst case of chicken pox your doctor had ever seen? I don't know why Grandma has three loaves of unopened moldy bread in the dining room. Lol, her stack of garage sale microwaves look like some avant garde installation. Um, kinda like risky art. I am sorry I called you Crater Face; I am sorry your face has craters.

Dad's Every Other Weekends

Once, when dad actually showed up,
he took me and my brother to the country,
parked on the side of the road,
handed us a gun. I don't remember
the gun much, more the sign we aimed for,
the car parked half-way on the road,
the itchy dead grass catching my socks.

I wanted so much to impress, to force a hole
through the rusted aluminum square swaying
on a crooked pole. I don't remember how many
times I tried, more the upset of an eight year old arm
from the .22's recoil. Afterwards, he let us keep the shells,
dusty souvenirs which magically appeared at our feet.

When mom did laundry, she found them in our pockets,
wanted to know what the hell. I don't remember what
we said to get them back, if she eventually released them
from her fists, only that she waited for us to answer.
20 years later, I asked my brother if this actually happened,
did I just make it all up. "Yeah," he said. "It was fun."

Omnicide

We get a call. Come to find a secret child slipped out of Grandma Clegg's uterus fifty years ago. A new Aunt. *Yay*. I hear she has a son named after something that grows on trees. I hear she looks like her mother. Went to school for an unfinished lit degree. Psychic mothers will tell you all along things you will eventually know are going to happen. You will hold your palms open & you will listen. You have the gift, Mom says. You have Apache blood & Paxil. You will require guests at your party: spinster aunts thrown off bridges, Catholic coke head aunts, un-aborted Anti-Christ aunts, acne. You'll have hearts that attack you, brains that schizophrenic & Bi-Polar, dead Grandmothers who turn on computers on the anniversary of their deaths; guys mom marries who scream "fuck you in the ass" at public symphonies in the park.

Poor Padre Pio

I tried to Catholic among Catholics who were raised to alcoholic who cursed in Spanish, dated transvestites who had the title of Captain.

blessed art thou amongst women

the fruit of thy

Bensen & Hedges, names coating the tongue like egg yolk, metallic green box the color of Easter. During one particular Sunday, the other girls in their skirts & vests & tall socks turned into pinched piles of salty dust evenly deposited like presents along the pews. Just like I asked for.

guilt tastes like a cigarette

the apocalypse reads like a syllabus

I'm a Camel woman myself

Sometimes we float

sometimes we eviscerate

the third guy mom marries, his girth rising like a hot air balloon in the shape of an obese alcoholic, storing antique books, piling their spines in the station wagon. 8 year old me will decide: old books smell like fat husbands: earth worm sweat & vanilla extract, insulin boiling in the glove compartment.

to orphan to widow to divorce or to tomb

sometimes we affair with a man who
looks like John Denver

Let's apologize to husband number 1.

What you've been waiting for:

a slight chance of frog & brimstone

what the fuck's your problem

This Side of the Sea

Beside: someone decides work decides we live in Seaside
an unnamed Side of the Sea past dunes sunk a wall dividing

Paradise: houses of gentries lapping ocean fronts can buy
the ocean front Pacific Grove, Carmel, Pebble Beach
Grove of the Pacific Garden of Paradise Beach of Pebbles

low income houses low income Marina long lives the hand that feeds Paradise

eternity is yes, sir no, ma'am, thank you let me check for you that'll be
manager on aisle 7 sorry you're unsatisfied come again let me fix it for you
for you let me refund sell overcooked raw complaint can lose my 7 an hour

Chant of the brain's side portion :
fuck/ thank you

think of the brain connected to the hand the hand connected to the plate to the cash

dream of the american:

don't get it college of the community math teacher confusing algebra with real life
negative numbers don't really multiply negative with a negative is a positive *what?*
debt created without credit for being born negative with a positive is a pay check gone with fifty
bucks left for two weeks good luck with your ocean front heaven

earthbound we cash & carry & create
new negative balances dictionary vernacular
[seeou], foul, eightysixed, twitch much 'fraid so, [poo-tah]

translation:

no. there is no upper class ocean front equivalent