

Superman

Superman was never intended to be viewed in black and white-at least not the 1978 version. But in my mind, the image of Christopher Reeve, fists piercing the confines of Earth's atmosphere, is forever framed by the 8x8 black and white television of my childhood. It's funny, the things we remember. Moving. Always moving. Endings and beginnings in a yellow Rider Truck. A bittersweet dichotomy: Leaving California, my friends of the sun-filled, 3rd-grade classroom replaced with gray, cinderblock walls-Saint Margaret Mary Catholic School in Pennsylvania.

Too soon, my 9th birthday, looming and sure to bring the favored guest- anxiety. . . Dread of unpredictability stepped back for childish hope and my mother's promise- a gigantic slumber party "Vis zo many girls, you vill hawv vun hundrit friends!" True to her prediction, they came. All fourteen of them. Dumping sleeping bags, pillows, and innocence into our tiny, two-bedroom rental. My absent parents- a moniker of my own invention-absent. My dad, a commuter pilot, out of town again, and my mom MIA after her shift at the bar. Naked in vulnerability, working to convince parents of my mother's impending arrival. Making excuses, assuaging concerns of "something not quite right." My mind screamed a silent plea: Not tonight; please, not tonight.

Details don't really matter now. The storm and leaves ripped from branches- a water-logged mass, carpeting the slick streets. Parents dragging out their crying daughters-the few mothers with that "something not quite right" feeling-nervously waiting. And the T.V. Our first newly-purchased, (used) color TV-the main event of the party...broken. Superman in color... broken. I can't even remember when or how it broke, only the brokenness-like the climax quivering before the bomb; it was the blood they noticed first. Then the accent. "Ya, zhe party is still on!" Her wild gesticulations. The leaves. She said it was the leaves. Her Volkswagon Beetle slid right into the telephone pole. No, no. She was fine- a broken nose- a few broken ribs-everybody can stay. Do I need to describe the horrified faces? The insistence I go home with one of them? My practiced routine-my resolve to protect her? No? The picture is clear. It's enough to see Superman in black and white.

Missed Signs

The bus pulls away as it does every day,
a snapshot of yellow in a framework of gray.
After lessons and learning relayed and conveyed,
connections with peers convincingly made,
My role of a student so perfectly played-
I stand at the corner, alone and afraid.

I fear not my surroundings, nor the path that I tread...
The route is familiar along with the dread-
the resolute realization of what lies ahead.
Lord knows her “condition” can leave her half-dead.
My need for security withers, unfed.

I’m turning the corner; my house is in view-
anxiety turns a darker hue.
Oh my God, if you only knew
the hell and the heartache I’ve been through.
All the signs... you’ve misconstrued-
while you, Mother, have come unglued.

Selective Memories

I send you a little note today on the stationery I bought with you in mind. Knowing you would admire the delicate purple flowers bordering scalloped edges, I see you savoring every word beneath your smudged magnifying glass.

We talk on the phone every day, reminiscing. We laugh. You say you feel better just hearing my voice- that you and Daddy will visit me soon. I used to call those words “pie-crust promises.”

It’s hard to fathom the missed opportunities, the years you spent nursing a hangover instead of my children. With all of the states and circumstances separating you from me, my bitterness fades with your memories.

But some of your days are better than others. Some days, you say that my dad is dead and ask me if I’ve seen him lately. You shout, “My time is almost up!” Now the world has its own circumstances, a virus to freeze us in place-but, not time.

I write my memory on creamy-white paper (with purple flowers.)

We take flight down the pier of the beach,

you carrying our shoes in one hand, my hand tethered to your other.

Weaving through board-walkers, we chant, “Aua, Aua, Aua!”

in your German tongue. Grey-winged seagulls chuckle and mew

encouragement of our hot-footed flight. A California pier stretches

endlessly, and my blonde hair is a comet’s tail reaching back to the sea.