

Roof Diving

It is our fourth date, a beautiful night and we step out onto the roof and the trees throw the wind at us. The stars beam down the cold. The hard light of the moon comes down to the roof. At that point I was writing a webcomic about cockroaches forming societies after the apocalypse. I thought about setting a webcomic on the roof of an abandoned building. It would be a place the cockroaches staged sacrifices or tried to communicate with extraterrestrials. Echo looks about to call out to the stars, like those whippoorwills that sing from the tops of apartment buildings. Maybe she is a whippoorwill. The tiles feel rough like tree bark, and I stand at the very edge, mistaking awe for adrenaline and not really caring. All night Echo and I quoted from books and movies, and see which quotes the other person understands, and Echo talks about each of the characters in the webcomic, and what they would say in different situations.

“It’s 4 am,” I say. “Time to head back?”

“I’m waiting for something,” says Echo, and I realize I am waiting, too. I realize we are going to stay up on that roof until a comet appears, until huge scissoring winds push us up against the wall, until one of us talks from our guts, says something shocking and heartfelt.

“I have to tell you something,” Echo stops, takes a short breath, tucks both feet under her butt. “My dad tried to commit suicide last year. This is the building he jumped off.” She speaks from the back of her throat, and I feel her letting me into her guts, into her deep down personal stuff.

“That’s terrible.” I hold Echo’s back and shoulders and creased spine and listen, waiting for her skin to move and breath and talk. I listen to her skin. I hold her creased spine in my creased fingers, it is strong and delicate at the same time.

She looks younger when I bend down, like a cheerleader, with wide, pure blue eyes under floppy hair dyed orange blonde. Grown into the warm metal of her tongue ring and the strands of her hair. It would probably stay there forever, becoming the background. “How long ago?”

“This is the two year anniversary of his death,” Echo said. She would have been a senior in high school, when no one understands death, when life is about soldiering from class to class and lunchroom conversation to the next. She has been brave.

Echo unstraps a blue and green, big faced watch and tosses it off the building. “This is my father’s watch,” she says. “I’ve worn it since his death.” Echo throws the watch over the building, like tossing something cursed into a fire. She tosses it heroically. I hear the watch breaking with a tiny tinny sound. Time to let it go. *Time to let everything go*, I think, and I stand on the edge of the roof where the wind would blow me over, if I was a bird or a bat.

A wisp of Echo’s hair falls in front of her face. A weird bird flies across the moon, a bird with spindly legs and a round head way to large for its body. On the roof, someone graffitied “On Top of the World” in twisted cursive. I imagine my father’s death. I’m too prepared. My father’s a living factory that processes the past, and he’s almost seventy, anyway. I stand on the edge of the building and, I’m pretty sure as everyone does, imagine what it would be like to jump off.

I take off my hat and let it waver to the ground. A gesture of allegiance, I guess. I let it go, I let it soar and glide through the air and touch down in the middle of the road. I take off my coat and throw that off the building. It slouches to the ground. Echo takes off her scarf, which flies almost horizontal three or four meters before dropping onto the roof of the shorter building

next to ours. “Ooops,” Echo laughs, and we are laughing together. We sound like coyotes on the top of the roof.

“I go up here to prove I won’t jump off,” she says. I wrap my arms around her.

“That’s beautiful,” I say. Her hair flies back and forth, looking for a second like the mane of a wild horse, or grass moved by a hawk’s wings. Her bravery is embedded in her face, in her beauty. “You’re brave. You’re so brave.” I start to dance with Echo, one foot forward, one foot back, the star’s light slinking down to the roof. Maybe I’m in her suicide dream, maybe she’ll wake up and her father will be OK, and she’ll forget what grief feels like, and she’ll be just like me.

He knows Echo might be a cutter, might even be suicidal. He read poets are almost eighty percent more likely to commit suicide. He composes tweets in his head, maybe for himself, maybe for Echo. *Poets are almost eighty percent more likely to commit suicide. FML*

After the top of the building, I sometimes stayed awake trying to remember my grandfather’s funeral, the grief palpable like whining mosquitos. I remember the way I talked to the relatives, how I held the flowers at the base of the grave. How I put a chunk of funeral cake in my mouth, delicately. At a funeral every detail comes from grief.

After the top of the building, the suicide dreams started. Every few weeks I dreamed of one of my friends, never a family member, commits suicide by jumping off a building. During the dream I talk to the friend’s family, prepare a memorial speech, cry a little, bring flowers to the grave. Cheap carnations, like the ones my dad puts on the dinner table. I feel grief on my chest like big furry dog. Grief never stops me from eating the funeral cake, shaking hands with

the family, saying consoling words, because all of my actions occur in, because of and are directed toward grief. I wish I could say I know grief well. I am tempted to quote a line from a Gary Miranda poem: “No one I have ever loved has died, exactly.”