

Brooke Rosen

It Felt Like Being Born

Finely upholstered, Dr. Katherine O.'s couch sits somewhere in my memory so I can lie down when I'm tired. The last time I did, I let go of my mind and it wandered back to that day in August-- the day that Katherine picked up the dusty blanket of tenth grade, and shook it. The dust went everywhere.

"...he got arrested the next morning! Arrested! For having sex! Can you believe that?" I was silent. No, I couldn't believe it, but not in the same way that Sam couldn't.

We had been lying around for hours, reading the news. I threw myself into his bed and wrapped my body in his big, red comforter. I like feeling safe.

He offered me some stale Cheez-its. "Anyway, *I* can't. I can't believe anyone could ever get arrested for SEX." His mouth was full of crumbs. "I mea'm unlef vey ha'b a," he swallowed, "a knife or something, then maybe I could believe it."

The almost-morning light pushed me out of his bed.

"Oh hey you want me t'a drive you?"

"No I'm good, car's out front." My dad's, not mine.

I opened up the windows and let the humidity fill me with everything I was missing. The streetlights were yellowing with age; the palm trees thrashed in the wind; it felt like being born. I swear, every moment can be the moment you were waiting for.

At home, I picked up all of my books and lined them up on the shelf. I angled and re-angled my chair. I flattened the carpet, moved the chair, flattened the carpet again. I cleaned my dishes. I organized my sticky notes. I remade my bed. Finally, when it all felt right, I went to sleep.

Sometimes it's hard to control what goes on. Sometimes, people do things that you don't want them to, and all you can do is lie there and take it.

I woke up remembering Katherine and rushed out the door, drunk with sleep. By the time I got to her office, the sun and the smell of Spanish Moss had me awake.

I had begun attending sessions in June. By July, Katherine had me convinced that I wasn't crazy, and at 9 a.m., August first, I brought her my paintings.

"Why aren't there any people in the lake?" she asked.

"I guess I just like nature more."

She scribbled.

"I mean, there are people in a couple of my older paintings."

"You know, there's something I've been meaning to ask you about, but I don't want to ask you until you're ready. Let's see this painting first."

There are those times in life when you wish people would think "it" was as big of a deal as you think it is. This was not one of those times.

"What is this about?"

"It's a self-portrait."

"What about this part here?" She was holding the top canvas so that it fit together with the bottom, and she was holding it a little too tight. "The broken hips and the girl with no mouth?"

"I wasn't really thinking when I painted this."

"What about the face that opens, or the blurred pictures?"

"I told you, it's a self-portrait--"

"--the infinity sign or the tree with no leaves?"

"I honestly just painted the thing."

"I want you to tell me what happened."

Often survivors: are unable to relax or feel physically safe. Some survivors: feel compelled to be perfect. Many survivors: worry about going crazy. Many survivors have a hard time: being fully present in their bodies.

"It wasn't your fault..." Katherine's words echoed, hollow. I mean, how could anyone ever know whose fault it was? I'm the one who must have said something, done something.

"...and it is a big deal." I'm still not sure about that one.

I went home and showered. I folded all of my clothes, reorganized my drawers and made the bed for the fourth time that day. This didn't feel good. I went over to Sam's to be with someone.

"It's cool, you can chill, I was just about to watch *Eyes Wide Shut*."

"Could we watch something else?"

"Yea, sure, no problem. This good?" I forget which movie we chose.

I climbed into his bed. I like feeling safe.

"Want me to move over?"

"No, you're fine." Things were where they were supposed to be.

"You okay?" Katherine's words echoed: *and it is a big deal*.

"Today was a bad day." I wanted it to count.

"What happened?" I never thought it counted, but I wanted it to.

"I mean nothing happened..." I wished it would happen again, just to make it count.

Sam tried to kiss me. I didn't care much but I moved over anyways.

"Something wrong?"

"I just.. I.I..."

"Bless you!"

"Thanks."

"Sorry about the dust, shit gets everywhere."

"I know," I said, pulling the covers closer, "it's not your fault."

Time's just going by. It's always there, no matter what you do at least the sky changes. Time's going by and the sky's changing and you don't know what you did that counted that day, except for maybe talked to someone. For them, you only exist for ten minutes. For them, those ten minutes represent what the rest of your day must be like. But those ten minutes are a blink, and you spend most of your day sitting in this mud-puddle of doing and not doing and thinking about doing. And the time's going by and the sky's changing and you're thinking about doing but not doing and it feels like mud.

Fever Dream

I was down by the ocean for the first time in a year. I remembered it like a dream, a fever dream, and now I was back. I stepped in the sand, step after step the sand bathing my bare feet until they were raw. Tissue-paper skin and aching bones... "I must have a fever," I thought. I lowered my hands into the ocean, and the water from my hands dripped acidic--dripping onto fragile skin and nerves, nerves everywhere. Nothing had ever felt so real. I changed pace, walking even slower now. Walking back to the car, rolling up the windows, and making my way back to Corinne's apartment in Miami-Shores, Florida, where she lived with her new husband and their noticeable age-difference.

The door was unlocked, which meant "come in," and I was grateful to hear silence when I did. Corinne usually left the television on. Either that, or her parents were over and yelling in Italian. I always felt shy for not understanding. Time was going faster than I was, carrying bones and tissue-paper skin into the bedroom to find the newlyweds, but they weren't there. They weren't in the apartment.

Pounding my left temporal lobe, the fever wrapped me in ache and nerves. I sat. I felt my forehead and lowered my hand to cover my eyes, seeing hurt. More time passed. Maybe they stepped out? More time. More time. More time. I reached for the phone--it hurt. I dialed some numbers, Corinne's mother answered in Italian, I asked whether she knew where her daughter was. I didn't mean to sound like one of those anti-drug commercials but I guess I did because Corinne's mother started yelling at me for accusing her and came over.

An angry Italian mother and the embodiment of fever. This wasn't good. I needed to lie down, but instead Corinne's mother made me call all of our acquaintances while she dialed the family. I was in no state to talk. I pretended to call John, Cory, Maria and Gaby. I mumbled "yea, uh-huh, yeap, okay" into their absent ears and closed my eyes. The fever was pushing down on my forehead. I opened my eyes. The fever was Corinne's mom.

"You're so haht!"

The door opened.

"Bambina!"

“Surprise!”

I didn’t get it.

“We wanted to see how you would react if we went missing!”

Not fair. “What if someone had...you left the door...”

“We know, we waited until you pulled up to sneak out.”

Goosebumps, tissue-skin, acid sweat; I slept for days.

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