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Wild Horses

Samantha Leach

In fifth grade our classroom walls were lined with pictures of faraway places, of the wonders of the world and now when I look back all I can think is that you wont get to see them come to life. We were young and the world was in front of us and we wanted to go to Venice. Each week one of us was assigned to present on a different wonder of the world, I remember Stonehenge, perhaps that was assigned to either you or me. I don't know if either of us had Venice, it didn't matter, we wanted to see the city that was drowning before the event occurred. When I picture you I imagine you there, although your spirit remains cemented in the dirtied backdrops of our hometown. Your presence was always strong and it crept out of the cement and the dirt and the trees and the roads of Providence, the streets that sprawled in front of us like Blackstone Boulevard. We would run up, hide in and dance down the Boulevard as we grew up into the people we would become. We had dreams that stretched so far out of our city and it felt as if every time we walked down the boulevard our independence and the open air brought us three steps and a hop closer to the untouchable, the outside world. Every step I take down Thayer Street or Dryden Avenue or Freeman Parkway makes me believe the following one will penetrate the gravity between us. But, like Venice, the days between us are sinking and my memories fade and imagination pervades but in the moments before the ancient Italian ruins collapse I'll take walks on brisk days and breathe you in.

After the funeral I talked to a girl I had a lot of resentment towards and I didn't want to look at her. I made her the villain so I could feel like the hero. Then she told me her first memory of going to your house. The three of us were walking up the stairs to your room and she started to walk behind you. I turned to her and said, "You can't walk behind Elissa, only I can do that. She wears a thong with her jean skirts and you would be able to see her ass." A view reserved only for pre-pubescent boys and myself. My honor, my privilege, their fantasy. I had your back. We were partners wanting to live like outlaws and we didn't know how to do that in our own context so we looked to the cliché role models of privileged girls. Marilyn Monroe, Audrey Hepburn and Twiggy, to name a few. You were always loose and I was the free spirit, the hippie as you called it. I had a pension for literature and history so

I became obsessed with the summer of love and 1969. I listened to the Velvet Underground, wore floral prints, had a San Francisco t-shirt, giant sunglasses and burned incense because I was too young and naïve to find a way to score pot. My mom thought I was a pyro that summer, I carried a lighter and burned incense walking around letting the thick fumes of ginger glide through the air leaving the trail of my reputation. You got your belly button pierced sometime that spring and wore a spray painted trucker hat that said your nickname, Knees, with every implication. We came at debauchery through different methods and arrived at a sisterhood that turned heads at our country club and raised the eyes of the headmasters of our independent school.

The last time I saw you before you got sent away I think you were sober and pretending to be drunk. First it was Outward Bound, then a therapeutic boarding school, then the halfway house. You moved all throughout the country from Minnesota to Wyoming to Nevada, never stopping, always in transit, forever rebelling. That night we were in the bathroom at my step-brother, your cousin's bar mitzvah and you spent the night giggling to yourself in a skin tight blue dress putting water on tampons and throwing them up on the ceiling. The tampons would fall and you'd reapply them with more water and throw them up again, satisfied by the simple science. You had nothing to say and I was hoping for a miracle. I thought your treatment was the answer. We all did, at the time. Your eyes were void of feeling that night, they were all sparkling eye shadow and no emotion. You looked past me and I looked into you and when you left I cried and when I was near you I put on a happy face because I was happy just to be with you.

Walking into Captain Seaweeds I hadn't seen you in two years and my hands mimicked my state of mind, shaken. There was so much to say to you I felt my body warming as I moved towards you, but you embraced me and your petite pale hands felt like the words I couldn't say. We made small talk, laughing about how kitschy the nautical décor was on the bar walls. We pointed

out anchors, fish bowls and sailor hats and one of us made a joke that they reminded us of bar mitzvah decorations. I made fun of you for wearing a tube top and you told me you liked my doc martens. In a moment of silence I took out lip-gloss to steady my hands and I rubbed my lips vertically, not horizontal and you called my bluff. You couldn't believe after all these years my lack of coordination still prevented me from properly smacking my lips together. I blushed and looked to the floor, you were still my best friend.

In the moments leading up to receiving the phone call that would tell me what had happened I discovered the song Wild Horses by the Rolling Stones and before I knew about it the song conjured such images of melancholy in my mind I knew the tides were beginning to rock. I distinctly remember driving to get my eyebrows threaded, perhaps fifteen minutes away from my house down the winding highway through downtown. All the signs were depressing, and the air had begun to turn bitter and I was unsure if I was ready to return to California. I felt an aching to stay cemented to my roots but an excitement to get back to the adventure. I passed the red neon Japanese sign on the side of the convention center and the worn Lifespan billboard and I was both coming and going. I was so excited to show my mom this new song. I pulled it up on the Youtube app and declared it the best Stones song I had ever heard. She agreed it was great. When I finally got that call I was parked outside of Wheeler, the school where my childhood had occurred and intertwined with yours. I was sitting in my mother's car, in front of the gazebo that we sat in for eight years waiting for one of our mothers to pick us up. Your mom in the giant black Subaru, my mother in the sleek sedan. I kicked the dash and punched the steering wheel and put on Wild Horses until I became numb and my eyes were too bleary to see the radio to change it. In my kicks I hit the emergency break and was stuck and I called my mom screaming so loud that I couldn't verbalize words and Wild Horses ran on a loop and swallowed me whole. *Childhood living is easy to do, the things you wanted I bought them for you. Graceless lady you know who I am. You know I can't let you slide through my hands. Wild horses couldn't drag me away.*