The Accident

by *Karen Zolo*

Wisdom

I slammed the door and didn't look back. Thoughts of the past can shock my body through a shiver or a wince or a quiet snort, but these memories are bubble-wrapped by thought itself as past, as all things already gone and no longer worth its weight, unless it is weightless. "*Just like pictures in a book, Danny.*"

As the song sings, "*I'm not there, I'm gone.*"

The Accident

Into the pavement — the impact knocked the memory of itself out of my head. The first thing I do recall is the bus that was stopped in the middle of road, looking at me with its headlights; the feeling of stillness when just before I was in motion. The bus had nothing to do with what happened, but it saw everything as the things ones' body does in order to keep on living.

Cheerful People

A few hours later, a cheerful woman's voice woke me up from my semi-conscious state. She sounded present, awake, and very peppy about being in the ER at 5 in the morning. Before I could see what she looked like the curtain was pulled to give us each our respective privacy. "I took 20 Tylenols and 5 or 6 T3s. Thanks for being nice. You remind me of my ex-boyfriend," she said to the orderly.

The orderly said something amiable and asked her if she had ever done anything like this before. "I was here 3 nights ago, I tried to hang myself... Are you going to pump my stomach?"

I heard wheeling and a few voices, and noises of what I assumed to be the stomach pumping procedure. Then it was calm and quiet and I drifted back under, over, under again. The orderly came to check up on me a few times as my heart rate was low enough to cause the machine concern. His name was Anthony. I couldn't really make out what he looked like with my contacts off but I enjoyed the feeling of being taken care of, and of the morphine. He called me 'champ,' asked how I was, and told me that if I was heavier I would have probably been 'worser.' My voice was throaty and crackled. I wondered what I must have sounded like to my suicidal neighbor. We were in quite a similar situation, all things considered.

In and out for the next few hours, I overheard the conversation she had with a psychiatrist. She was not actually a girl, but a woman, 29 years old (!), who broke up with her boyfriend a few months ago and had trouble being alone. She worked full time at a restaurant. She was from the interior. "I don't know what it is, I'm not unhappy." She said this all in that same clerically cheerful voice as if she was reading lines off a script.

Discharge

At around noon, a big hunk-hulk of a doctor came in to speak to me. I didn't like him so much, he asked me if it was worth it, and made a joke about my ego being more injured than anything else. He looked like a huge, muscular hamster and wrote me a prescription for Oxycontin. It was time to leave.

I reached for my stuff that was tucked under the bed in a plastic bag: my t-shirt was barfy and bloody, too damp and smelly to wear, so I asked Anthony if there were any extra shirts. It would have been too ridiculous to walk home in the gown. He disappeared for a what seemed like a long time and came back with a thick, purple t-shirt that had some pop-punk stars and swirls on it. I almost handed it back to him.

Someone Else

On my way out, I peeked at my neighbor who was sitting up, staring vacantly into no direction. She had neat shoulder length blonde hair, round eyes and a pointy nose. I slippity-slapped in my blood stained jelly shoes down the hall, and eventually found my way out onto the sunny, tree lined side street. It was a short 15-minute walk home, and I did so very slowly, appreciating how lucky I was considering what had happened. What had happened needed some layers of bubble wrap. Hunched over in the purple t-shirt, I kept looking at my reflection in the passing windows. I wanted to pet her crunchy head, whisper soft nice words into her cracked body. I am a different person now. The counter woman at the drug store does not make eye contact.

Permanent Vacation

While waiting for her prescription, she receives a call from Anthony. She had left her t-shirt at the hospital. She hadn't meant to, it was one of her favorites: a big baggy white sack with a film-still of Jim Jarmusch's *Permanent Vacation* on the front. He is dancing in a desolate room. The words *PERMANENT VACATION* are printed prominently under the image. Given the circumstances though, she couldn't imagine walking back to claim it. She told him that it was okay and then, "Bye."

Regret

Now I wish I had the shirt as a record of what happened, but at the time, I wasn't really there.