

## SOMETHING LOST: *IN MEDIAS RES*

...and you awake from a dream at 2 a.m. because the cell phone on the bed beside you is vibrating. And in the darkness of your bedroom with the shades drawn, tiny screen illuminated, the nightmare you were having now bleeds into reality. You consider just letting the call collapse, maybe let it vibrate itself empty. But you answer it on the third, maybe fourth calling, because the name on the screen matches the profile of your sister, April; who should have been home hours ago from a party just up the street, hosted by some boy named Matthew, a football player, who you vaguely remember sighting in the hollowed out hallways of your high school.

Someone is crying in the background when you say "hello?" and the voice that answers is not your sister, but rather a harmonic melancholy of her best friend, Sarah.

"You need to come," she says, slowly, forcing you to question momentarily if perhaps you are still dreaming. "—something happened."

When you ask what it is that has happened, she refuses to explain over the phone. Instead—she tells you, "It's probably better if you just come. Please hurry."

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In a stupor that excels any of the drunks you will find at the party here tonight, you make your way down the street. There is no need to drive because the house is so close and just around the corner on Jefferson Ave.

The night is a particularly tempered sort of hot, where the sweat from your warm body bleeds through your clothes and breaks down beading past your brow. The pavement is also warm beneath your bare feet, all below the raw summer moon.

Rows of houses run the entire stretch of asphalt, resembling the high metal walls and watchtowers of concentration camps, where, here, there are none. And that asphalt if when followed—still more houses. More blacktop there, for miles and miles further.

A meager pack of coyotes scour garbage cans for scraps of food, things your parents deem inedible, unsavory, and imperfect. And when they see you, they salivate. They watch you when you approach, when you linger too long in passing.

You think, *oh, how glazed eyes resemble diamonds when reflected from the moon.*

And this—*suburbia*—how it reminds you of a jungle in and of itself.

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The house is loud. You hate the songs these kids all want to play; obnoxious, some deafening, but most, if not all dumb. Everything is *fuck this* and *bitches that*. They

force you to shield your ears, to pine for the solace of your warm bed that you know will only grow colder the longer you are absent.

Out on the freshly manicured lawn, the drunkards are fighting over who will take the newly crowned *Miss Nevada* home tonight. But amidst the bloody noses, the split knuckles, and cracked ribs, she leaves with a boy from the swim team. And the drunkards—idiots—they refuse to cease their fighting.

A lone Jack Daniels bottle, drained, floats tranquil in the swimming pool, as you witness someone in a Green Day shirt pumping violently at one of the kegs. He insists on striving for that liquid gold, and, though long gone, continuously seeks the last few drops that may be hiding at the bottom of the well.

Inside, you see those kids in their tightly knitted, fitted, prep school uniforms, hovering over a coffee table, while wishing there was still more *white* left to go around. The girl—a voluptuous blonde with perfect eyes and an imperfect soul—you watch her lick the table. You watch her lick her fingers, watch her press the nubs of each one into the gums of her yellowed teeth. These vultures of the desert, these abridged versions of an often forgotten collection of society—how they envy your normalcy, how they often dream of stealing your life. They will eye you with reproach when you enter, doubtlessly sneering when you leave.

And up the stairs you hear the distant sounds of thunder and profanities; the *rock ‘n’ roll* of perverted jazz behind closed doors. *Oh, these screams of young lust, you imagine, disguised as honest love.* Come tomorrow, when the sun arrives, and after all this youthful petty sex, they will regret what was said in secret here tonight. And these young lovers, they will deny to their fathers ever committing the acts of things they always promised they would never do again.

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Into the only door left ajar you venture, where inside Sarah paces waiting for your arrival. When you see her, you notice she is not crying. But then you see your sister’s boyfriend Wes, naked from the waist up, nursing his face in his hands. He, you see, is the one crying. And on the floor of a bedroom you have never seen before, a Mickey Mouse blanket with the silhouette of your sister is still and motionless. And when you peel back the blanket, there she is.

Your sister—she is not sleeping.

She did not drink excessively and beyond her means, simply passing out.

She did not tire from a long and strenuous day, simply falling asleep alone.

Because your sister is so pale and cold and blue, you cannot come to any better conclusion than the truth. Your sister, she is not breathing. Because your sister—she is dead.

You turn and notice Sarah there beside. You take into account her quiet, macabre silence. She extends her hand to place upon your shoulder, to comfort you, but pulls away at the last second; and, you think, *probably for the best.*

And Wes, he sees you crouch down there beside your sister, as if praying for the return of her immortal soul; and in this motion he no longer sustains the river of tears, and commences overtly weeping. “Oh, God—” he cries. “Please let her be okay...” But all his prayers and tears cannot bring back your sister from wherever we all go from here; just as they certainly will not do a fucking bit of difference for the nightmare in which you find yourself now living.

You close her eyes with your fingers. You know if you felt for a pulse you would not find one. You know if you pressed your ear against her bosom, like a thousand times before, crying harder than a thousand times before, you would not hear the sound of a heart beating.

And when you wrap her in that blanket and uplift her tightly into your arms, you will remember the sister who once laughed with you, and who truly kept you when you cried. This—the same sister, who would rock you to sleep each night while your mother slaved away, graveyard shifts at the hospital. And who sang to you with perpetual elegance, the songs that eased you into dreams.

“What are we going to do...?” Wes says. Though, you are not listening. You are too busy ignoring the stares of the others, those who watch you so intently, and who gauge your every breath. Should you survive this, it will not come without repercussions. Without whispers. Without stories. It will not come without the singular loss of a family member, but rather also your so-called ‘friends.’

Sarah, she says, “Call 911 Wes,” and he nods while recovering his phone. Wes, he stops and shakes himself alive. He tries violently to compose himself, before staring down at the small illuminated keypad. He stops just short of dialing. “What’s wrong,” Sarah asks, confused.

“What was the number again?”

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Once more on the open lawn, you fall to your knees still cradling her in your arms. You can’t help but brush away the loose strands of tawny colored hair that fall across her face. There, on that patch of grass, at just past three in the morning, you sing the song your sister sang to help you sleep through thunderstorms. You rock her back and forth, back and forth—until the paramedics come, and strip her from your arms.

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The way your mother finds out—is you show up in her ER at just past four in the morning on a Saturday. So tired from that all-nighter and sipping coffee to remain awake, she smiles when she sees you. You will remember this moment, years from now, as the last time you see your mother happy. Because when she sees that gurney there beside you, all adorned in that white sheet, the one in the shape of your

sister, her smile—it will fade.

And your mother, she will not cry at first, but rather, she will leave her coffee to fend gravity and, in losing, a great dark lake will form upon the vinyl floor. Only then will your mother just begin to cry when she pulls away the curtain to receive her daughter—her baby—her one-half of the whole world.

And you will hold your mother when she starts to fall, and when she starts to cry because you know that she needs to be held right then.

And you, you will not say anything.

Because your mother, she will not say anything.

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After they bury your sister in the plot beside your father, after the preacher says some words, and your family, your so called friends, all cast up their sympathies—you will borrow your mother's cherry red Mustang with no intention of ever bringing it back.

And you—you will drive.

You will drive so far, so fast against a setting sun that you will race the stars as they gain on you, your back taillights. The headlights, they will fight the yellows and the reds, pinks and oranges of a horizon lined with the silhouettes of hills, the mountains just beyond your eager grasp. And in your grasp, the only prize you make from this heartache, there, beside you in the passenger seat, Sarah, sits reading aloud from your sister's diary, as you slam your foot down on the gas pedal. And from her lips come all the childhood crushes. Your sister's favorite books, movies, and songs they come crashing from Sarah's ruby red lips. Those ruby red lips, she smiles at you with as she sings and cries aloud a passage about you. All the red lights and stop signs disappear behind you, deemed unimportant now, then, ever again, as Sarah says, your sister she believes you brave. And your sister, she believes that you are smart. Your sister says that you are some kind of *infinite* that will leave this God-forsaken town in either a mustang or a hearse. And Sarah, she is smiling. And, like you, longing, when she sings all of your sister's thoughts aloud.

And up ahead in the distance, shadowy earth you seldom thought existed, let alone ever considered conquering, is a sign that reads, "Reality begins... NOW," marks the furthest you have ever traveled *west* of home.

And your sister always thought you handsome, always thought you brilliant, and always thought you kind. Your sister, she was proud to know you in the time that she was alive.

The home in which you leave falls somewhere just behind as you.