

Amber
Matt Pierson

She sat there, listening to her headphones. She was watching the cars on the highway with a perfect complexion and a blank expression. Her view from the hammock on that grassy hill was “one of the most beautiful views in the county” (E.R.A. Real Estate Catalogue House #91). What she really saw was this: a street going to an exit ramp with cars slowly filing down it to the unseen interstate below. The queue was insurmountable because a sofa had fallen out of the back of a truck in the middle of the road.

Her knoll was shaded by a falling oak tree, her house situated across the street behind her. Her only shelter from the beating sun was a copse of trees: oaks ostracized from the collective forest for the injustice of human use. A cop was trying to make his way on the side of the road to the top of the ramp, but he was making little progress, lights and all.

The wildflowers on that side of the hill reflected and absorbed the police light, making something like a natural Kandinsky painting. By an odd sort of choice, she couldn't see the beauty of the flowers, but simply sat there. Her phone was sitting on the kitchen counter, the light streaming out of its wildly singing face. She thought that maybe all that this required was a simple solution: a different way of looking at things, a simple solution to a complicated problem.

She couldn't smile about yesterday, and she had been trying to smile about it since it had happened. She had smiled then, though she wasn't sure what type of smile that was. She wondered if her face had been the same as his, like a mirror just . . . but she couldn't really think about something like that. She hadn't thought about it much in the couple hours beforehand, though when she thought back on it, maybe she had . . . She was pretty sure he had thought about it quite a bit. Why else would he have said that? Why would he call her “honey” and “baby” and . . . He had smiled afterwards, and maybe it was just after, and that's why, but nothing seemed any brighter. Wasn't there some brightness or drastic change in perspective afterwards? Not that anything was amazingly bright to begin with, but this definitely couldn't be it.

It had been raining, at the time, and he had a truck with a double cab and a long back seat. There's something to be said about back seats, but with all the clichés, that was exactly what had happened. She had been pushed into it, in more than one way. Afterwards, he thought that she was unresponsive and glazed over like . . . a mosquito trapped in a piece of amber. But he didn't really think that what had happened was anything like primordial tar. He had taken her home, and he had said goodnight, and she hadn't said much of anything since then.

She had eaten herself through with questions. She was like a mouse now; she couldn't resist. She didn't notice the flowers anymore or her music or anything she used to find solace in. She was commiserative with magnified ants, and mosquitoes in amber.

He pulled into her driveway, and rang the doorbell. Her mother answered the door, and said that she was out in the hammock, and that maybe he should take her phone to her because it had been ringing non-stop. He walked through the trees, vines stinging his ankles, and stepped unnoticed under the trees. She was confused because he was here. She didn't remember making any plans for today, and she had told him that she had a lot of homework to do, thankyouverymuch, so just give her some time to do that and then they could do something that night, like a movie or something, but nothing too exhausting because she had church in the morning. He looked at her and smiled. He proffered her cell phone, and she took it. She checked it and saw six missed calls. Six missed calls from him. She caught his smile with her

eyes, and had a small moment of déjà vu. She had an instinct to roll her eyes, but instead she hesitated. She waited for the smallest eternity and forced herself to smile. A small, shuddering, melancholy, and rosy smile.