

Crepúsculo

by Jessica Spiegel, '03

There is a word that I learned from Pablo Neruda: *crepúsculo*. It means twilight.

I swim each night in the twilight of a hundred faces. These are the faces that I see through a silver mist. They are the faces that have found their way to that part of my brain where lost things are kept, neatly stacked, forever pressed behind frosted glass; forever just out of reach.

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Joe's face, from across my kitchen table, smiles his gentle smile at me. He sat with me in the kitchen for so long that night, watching as I sorted tiny beads into piles of reds and blues and glowing emerald greens. "What would you do," he said, smiling, if I just—" he gestured with his arms as though about to sweep his hands across the table, sending beads skittering to the floor. "If I just—*whoosh*." In remembering, we inject into our past a knowledge of the future; in this memory I know that Joe will die in a car crash in four months. Nights when his face appears I see him from across the bald, shimmering expanse of my kitchen table, dotted with gem-like piles of glass beads, and a burst of bright light explodes from his hands to mingle with my twilight sea. *Whoosh*.

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I slid my items across the black belt, hand brushing across a sticky patch of dried lemonade. Wheat bread. Italian ices. Peaches. The checker paused, not sure just what to make of those peaches. They didn't have a helpful little barcode on them, naturally. He was lost without the helpful little barcode. It was his first day. I smiled apologetically at the man behind me in line before realizing that he was not frowning out of impatience. He was staring at my face, my broken face with the blue and red bruise over my left cheekbone. The frown dissipated and he looked at me with tenderness. "You don't have to take that," he said gruffly under his breath. "You don't have to stay." I stared back at his gentle face and nodded. I wanted to crawl into his arms; I wanted him to say he would protect me. "I know," I said quietly. "Thank you." I don't know why I said that. I was the victim of a stray elbow in a crowd. There was no one to protect me from. But no one had ever looked at me that way before.

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And then there is Chava. She stares at me, sullen, from the one photograph that I have of her, trapped in a single frame, resigned to wear that same blank expression all my life. She is my prisoner—and I am hers. I know very little about my great-aunt Chava; I know that she died at the age of seventeen in a far away country that was her home but that I have never seen. I know the few details provided by my grandfather: a brilliant girl. Kind, hard-working. Selfless. And I know her face: from the photograph, and because her face is also my own. Times when my mother stares at me and I ask her why, she tells me the resemblance is incredible. She means the resemblance between Chava and me. She means the long dark hair falling across our faces. She means the thin lips and wide brown eyes which (my mother doesn't say this) look somehow sad most of the time, even when we are not.

My mother did not know Chava either; she speaks from the single photograph, and from my grandfather's description. A brilliant girl. Kind, hard-working. Selfless. Chava is my burden, this woman I never knew. Everything that I don't do, I imagine, she would have done. Everything that I do, I imagine, she would have done better.

This is all I know of Chava: this unsmiling photograph and a few words of description from my grandfather. Yet I have imagined her not as she appears, sullen and hollow, in the photograph: I have seen her smile and heard her laughter. And I realize that all of this time I have watched her in my mind, it is my smile and my laughter with which I have filled the void of that one blank expression frozen on yellowed paper. So perhaps she is not my prisoner; she is freed in my mind from the confines of a photograph. But I remain hers.

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In Wyoming a young man was brutally beaten.

When I first heard about it, he was clinging to life. The articles told of a shattered skull, bludgeoned so severely as to reveal the brain stem. The articles talked of 18 hours tied to a fence in freezing conditions. Yet, somehow I believed—assumed, even—that he would be alright; that in a few weeks' time I would hear his cracked voice on the evening news, see his swollen face, gaze at the bewilderment and pain in his eyes.

When I heard that Matthew died, I didn't cry. Perhaps that seems an unnecessary statement—who cries at the death of a stranger? I didn't. But I cry now. I cry as I turn the newspaper page past the story about the men who killed him; I cry because I can turn the page. I cry in the knowledge that someplace, there is a person who cannot flip idly past the picture of his sweet smile, his pale hair just barely in his eyes. Someplace there is a person who stares at that picture, choking on tears and gently running a finger over the inky image.

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The old red wooden rocking horse sits, forlorn, in the basement, looking much smaller than I remember. It was years before I was born that my father sawed each piece of wood, and selected that mottled shade of red-brown. Yet somehow

I have a distinct image of him crouched over the nascent animal, lovingly drawing in a mouth with black marker. My father was much younger then, with wild hair (now he has none). In this fake memory of mine I see him the way he appears in old photographs of his Adventures In Europe, before marriage and children and a job he hates. He wears tattered bell-bottom Levi's and oversized glasses with silver frames. I think of some of the Europe stories; a train wreck in Austria, a cabin in a Swiss valley: anecdotes experienced by someone I never knew, recounted by a man who wears Polo shirts and mopes when the weekend weather is bad.

The horse is for his not-yet-born daughter—the first of two not-yet-born daughters. He plans to place it in her room, and one day soon he will rock her gently back and forth on the red-brown wooden saddle. He carefully tests his creation, and it makes a slow creaking sound on the asbestos tiled floor. A fleeting image punctuates the rocking of the horse, and he is standing in a cool valley in Switzerland, mountains all around him, mountains close enough to touch, yellow flowers by his feet, the cold pine air stabbing his lungs.