

Sequins

by Amanda Sledz

A person is entitled to what she thinks and feels. A person can have all the thoughts and feelings she wants.

She can write them down on plain white index cards and file them away in her pretty little box.

She can decorate the box with roses and little sequin stars, and she can kiss it after putting on lipstick to leave her lip print.

She can bring this box with her to a tattoo shop and ask a tattoo artist to recreate this image on her upper arm, all the lip prints and stars and sequins. The tattoo artist might look at her funny, but at least it's not another tribal arm band or nautical star. He can scratch his head for a second and say, "How the hell do you tattoo a sequins?" She might respond, "I trust you."

Whitesnake might be playing in the background, planting images of red-headed women writhing on the hoods of cars while men who also look like women cover their genitals with guitars. Sounds of gum-popping can punctuate every chord while the endless buzz of the needle-wheel mixes ink and blood. When he's done, she might look at this tattoo and then look at the box and think her skin is better storage for secrets. Better than a box that anyone could find, anyway.

"There," the artist might say by way of finality. "Fucking sequins."

A person can pay the man, and burn the box.

Then a person can come home and half-hear a voice that says, "It looks like Hello Kitty threw up on your arm." Laughter.

A person can come home and wish she hadn't. This happens all the time.

A person can begin her day by having whatever she wants for breakfast. She can polish off two eggs and five pancakes in a single sitting, and then chase it all with four pots of coffee. A person can make her hands stop shaking by smoking one cigarette after the other, until one pack two pack three packs gone. It can become funny to her then, like an unfinished book by Dr. Suess, and she can chant this little sing-song to herself while she waits for the social worker to arrive and declare her unfit all over again.

A person can be sitting there, mouth open like a fly-catcher at a kitchen table covered in a plastic red-checker tablecloth with an army of cartoon ants, when the social worker comes in with her exhausted expression and clipboard and seen-at-all stance, to say, "Honey, we need to talk about the smell in here." And a person can respond, "What smell? I don't smell anything." Not every person smells the same. There are different ticklers in each nose.

A social worker might say, "It smells like death. Pure death."

A person is entitled to think that pure death smells kinda nice. A person can have all the thoughts and feelings that she wants.

And this social worker can tell a person how she should dress, how she should live, how she shouldn't drink quite so much coffee or eat quite so many pancakes or smoke exactly that many cigarettes, and a person can just nod along before nodding off and not even noticing that the social worker had gone. This social worker can leave a note with GET WELL written in all capital letters and underlined three times, but a person might know what orders to ignore.

A person is entitled to walk the same route she used to walk back then, any time she wants. She can walk all the way to the playground even though she doesn't have any children anymore. Not that she has custody of, anyway. And she can stand in the center of that playground, watching the children chase each other in circles with fingers extended and popping out of jacket sleeves, to better pass on the cootie touch. She can just keep right on standing there, watching, stinking with a cootie touch all her own. It's a free country.

She can keep right on standing there, until one of those playground assistants walks up to her and asks what the hell she's doing there. The playground assistant might have a radio in her hand, and a bundle of keys around her wrist supported by one of those spiraling rubber bands that hold playground assistants together. In moments like this a person has to leave. She has to keep walking, and has to get some more coffee. Definitely needs some more coffee.

On the way home, she can wait at the crosswalk for awhile, repeatedly pushing the button to get the signal to change. She might wait, and wait, and wait, until a person approaches looking just like him. Then she might walk into the crosswalk fast, right for him, connecting her shoulder to the stranger's with enough force that he reels back and almost falls, pulled by the weight of a backpack and the tangled leash of a dog she didn't notice, all the while barking, "What the hell is wrong with you?"

It's in this moment that a person can notice that the stranger doesn't really look much like him after all. Not really. She might not care, since she got what she wanted: something primal. Fear, even if just a spoonful. Even if only a taste.

After getting home, a person can peer into a toy box that still holds a few things that don't matter anymore. Rubber cement. A doll

missing an eye, with plastic painted-on hair. It used to shut its eyes when a person rested it gentle-like in her arms, and say *Mama* with the pull of a string. It might be broken. There might also be some strangely shaped something-or-other with too many flashing lights and sounds, the kind of toy given by an aunt or uncle that makes a parent plain crazy. She might not have everything, but she has a few things. Just in case.

A person can pour this rubber cement into a bowl, can watch it trickle out of the brown glass jar real...slow. She can cover her hands in gauze, using every webbed inch of what was stored in the medicine cabinet to dress and redress her tattoo. She can drop her mummified hands into the bowl, and feel the cold of the rubber cement pushing through gauze to kiss skin. A person might then dip her hands into a bucket of crushed glass. A plastic Halloween bucket with a handle, covered with jack-o-lanterns and white-sheet ghosts and black cats with electrified fur. All kinds of glass, but mostly beer bottles with Irish names. Bits of glass can sneak through the gauze and dig at her skin a little, red droplets of her own life penetrating the shield of white. Between the white and red and green and brown her hands might look a little like Christmas.

Some people might say a voice comes at times like this, to tell a person to do something. Maybe a good angel on one shoulder, a bad angel on another, or a dog barking messages from the devil. Another person might say that in these moments a person doesn't hear anything at all. Not even that static sound that makes it impossible to watch television. Not even the drum beats that come out of his mouth. A person can hear nothing, and know she's in the eye.

Some people might say a voice called a lawyer comes later, to remind a person that when things get complicated, they become *alleged*.

A person can wait for him to come home for a long, long time. Long enough that she doesn't change her mind once, not at all. She might think her sweat smells like more than coffee, and now it covers her hands. The sweat can loosen bandages, and she might think her fantasy of boxing gloves is reduced to sparkling kitchen mitts. This much glass on hands can be heavy, and when rubber cement dries it almost loses the stick. This might worry a person. She thinks a different adhesive might be better, before remembering that symbolism matters.

A person can think about her new tattoo, and wonder if the sequins are healing right, or if they'll lose some shine when they scab. A person can think this doesn't matter, because she feels the sequins sparkle, feels every lip print preserving the memory of an evening ritual that isn't hers anymore, *Mommy loves you, three kisses times three*.

Then a door might open to a person snake-coiled and rattling. He might put his briefcase down and take his glasses off for just a second to rub his eyes.

A person might take advantage of this, running at him swatting with blood and glass mittens until he kicks her in the stomach and yells, "What the hell is wrong with you?" He might forget all about his glasses, even after he dials 9-1-1.

See, a person can come home and wish he hadn't. This happens all the time.

A person might hold her stomach with her glass mitts, the gauze half unraveled. Rubber cement really doesn't hold for shit. She can shake off these mitts, only to discover tiny fragments underneath fingernails, larger shards etching new lines into palm. This might make a person laugh, and consider the old roads weren't taking her anywhere.

And a person can pray down through her toes that he gets it this time, and will finally stop loving her.

She can be taken to one of those hospitals, where everyone wears shoes without laces and gowns without ties. The nurse might say, "Oh honey" when she sees her stomach, which a person might have forgotten she was clutching with hands covered in glass.

And it might be that she starts giggling, thinking that the minute this 72 hour hold expires she'll have even more ideas to share, and eventually she'll find the right one that will end with her soaked up to her elbows in a blood type not her own. The nurse might ask about the bandage already on her arm, preserving lip prints and sequins into skin, holding all her treasure. She might not say a word.

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