

Accident

by Deborah Oster Pannell

Because I was feeling so good, so certain, so ready to move forward, and then all of a sudden, BANG. I was the bad one, the careless menace. Unbelievable. How could my entire position in the universe suddenly shift like that, from one moment to the next? I was here, and then I was there. Or rather, now I'm here, where it really isn't safe anymore. That's how quickly it all changed.

Stoned, in the back seat of the car, but I'm really controlling it. I'm controlling it with my mind, and I know I'm safe, even though I'm wacked out of my gourd. Because when you are connected, everything is OK. That's just how it works. And you can even tolerate a certain amount of chaos... well, actually quite a lot, really.

You have no idea just how much chaos and stress and pressure you can really handle, until it all comes down on you, and surprisingly, you're calm. You're calm, and you're cool and you're totally in control. And actually, you kind of like it, because you feel sort of powerful. You never knew just how much you could handle, and now, here you are.

The tests to your character come upon you unexpectedly. Even when you are already expecting certain awful things to happen, other awful things happen, just to mix it up. You can be as prepared as you like, but something ELSE will always come about. I hope you like surprises.

I am saying these things to myself, because I'm making friends with my future. My past was the crazy, stoned chaos where really everything was OK. Because I survived. It had a happy ending, because I made it through those chapters. If I had miscalculated, if the driver had been a little TOO fucked up, or I had not held myself as tightly bound to the lines on the highway that night, we might have drifted. Or, the night I drove back from North Carolina and woke up behind the wheel. Oh yes, I did that too.

Are you seriously going to tell me I don't have angels protecting me? Because OBVIOUSLY I do. Otherwise, how could you explain it? The way I just manage to slip between the cracks and the crazies and the abyss of lost too much of myself? I've given away more than I should have and still be able to hold on to the middle. I should have drifted off the shoulder years ago. I've played around the edges of the gravel for so long. Peered over the cliff, shredded the edges of the minutes and the seconds that separate me from just in the nick of time. I have cut it oh so very close.

Do you think I'm standing still here? Do you think I'm just sitting in the mud, wanking off to the slime of my own filth? What the hell is the plot? Is this the one where she loses faith and then meets a mysterious stranger who sticks around just long enough to help her believe in herself before he fades into the fog? Or is this the one where she sobs her way into triumph at the end by sheer force of will?

Well, my story is way more subtle than that. Mine's the one that gets counted out in seconds, no, microseconds. It's the one that starts with her imagining something strange growing on her nose, and then she looks in the mirror and sees that she has changed. That's it. That's all. It's very simple, elegant, no complications. It's a straightforward tale of recognition.

My story is about something that happens inside that you can't share, really. It doesn't translate into any steps or method or even a teachable moment, though that would be so handy, wouldn't it? My story won't offend with its sentimentality or clichés because it's not like anything that's ever been written or seen before.

My story started so long ago, with crimes I don't even remember. So there's no real "backstory." There's no justification, no hidden revelation that will tie the whole thing together. There's a lot of conjecture and approximation, and just plain luck.

And here's the thing. I can't promise you a happy ending. I could try, but I might have to change it at the last minute. It just isn't one of those things you can guarantee. All I know is that since the accident, everything is different.

