

Riposi in Pace.

by Johnny Dantonio

It was too young to be love.

We were 5;
a buzz-cut me,
and you,
plated with babyteeth,
running,
giggling,
whispering,
going quiet next to each other,
watching our sand castles
turn prey to the tide.
Our parents
monstrously ignored
the atrocity,
on the porch
with their funny tasting sodas.

Those neon bracelets,
hot pink,
neon green,
tattered with
a simple,
blinking
black pattern.
They wore in the water,
nothing but rope
by the end of the week;
power bracelets.
But we we kids,
wrist touching,
superhero screaming,
kids;

echoes
only you and I could share,
on our parents' beach trips
with their best college buds
and their children;

Our brothers
with their first fascinations,
their teenage embarrassment,
surreptitious beach walks,
hormone fixes,
and us;
left between dry,
grassy dunes,
talking about things that I sadly can't remember.

There is a picture
from one of those summers,
one that sits
on a forefront shelf
in my parents house,
our heads touching,
the back right curve of my skull
pinned to your left,
shoulder to shoulder,
wincing we're smiling so hard.
Someone's mom,
or old roommate,
or new girlfriend,
just inches away from us
camera in hand,
investigating our magnetism,
entrapped by innocent intimacy.
When I look at it now,
I wonder who those two are,

who you have become
besides a girl
my mom quietly tells me about
the days before you die.

I thought of you
between the 7,300 days
from then to now,
I bet there are entire weeks
dedicated to you.
Christmas cards,
your southern skin
pink in winter snow,
holding your autistic brother's hand
beneath an evergreen.
The feeble attempt of updates
that 'the whole gang' did for awhile,
you in satchet
and tiara
on a 50 yard line,
a beautiful woman
that I'd joke about leaving home
to go meet,
the censored version
of telling my parents I wanted you,
every inch of you,
draped around my neck and waist,
dangling beneath me,
shedding from a gold homecoming dress,
and confirming my self-confidence,
waves battering down castle walls,
feeling so ashamed when the next letter,
folded in thirds,
held no photos,
but an article about a brain tumor,

and immediately rubbing a dusty picture frame.

It was these new technology fads,
now worldwide regularities,
in which I learned of your triumphs
through a viral you,
carrying the Olympic torch
through Columbia,
sliding into normalcy
on a Georgia coast university,
and comments
turning into phone calls,
after date parties
or daiquiris,
telling me you missed me
like time never elapsed,
like I had been there after radiation
singed your expanding cells,
to talk about what you wanted
your funeral to look like.
The thought,
ever charming,
was quickly deterred
by a volatile love of my own,
screening your calls to appease a woman,
who would later quench the revenge of a broken heart,
through telling the police I hit her.
As I sat in a jail cell overnight,
I was too far removed from 5,
to remember the best way to catch sand crabs,
and too self interested for keeping in touch with anyone.

Around young professionalism,
renewed mental health,
it was a second hand email

that told me about your remission,
me repetitiously reading a sentence;
“she’s decided to live,

—

treatment free.”

A harrowing emptiness conjured
then vibrated
in the porosity of my bones.
I’m sure there was a late night call home,
a request to negate
what had been passed along,
please,
a debate as though I was convincing you,
not my mom,
stay alive,
persist,
a selfish argument I needed to have
to understand selfishness.

The days that followed incorporated you,
for me.

In retrospect,
I was devising a ploy
to indulge in proclaimed creativity,
going and documenting your last years,
falling in love with you,
selling the script as reality.
Maybe I’d write you something
to change your mind,
something so moving,
so powerful,
(I was an english major, you know),
that you’d go through
baldness,
exhaustion,

aching,
bruising,
jaw clenching pain,
jaw open pain,
and maybe we'd meet again,
and fall in love again,
and preach about fate,
and you'd look just like your senior year,
and we'd live that story,
not selling it for anyone,
but living it for one another,
for me.

I wonder if I ever made you cry
on those beach trips,
if I ever hit too hard,
tickled too much,
stole something of yours
and pretended it was mine.
I wish I could think
if there were those childhood moments,
where my mom holds my hand,
walks my red,
swollen face
to look at you,
you sitting in your mom's arms,
sobbing into her shoulder,
and I have to say sorry,
and then I have to repeat it,
and you have to accept it,
look at me and accept it,
and we have to hug,
and then we hold hands running out a sliding glass window,
down a long beach front dock,
onto sunset cooled sand,

our parents behind
giggling at their new maturity.

If I were next to you now,
as you lay in a Carolina bed,
withering,
I'd tell you how I'd give anything
to be in that picture,
where I'd close my eyes,
and inherit what's in you now
as our heads touch.

