

Rosemarie Dombrowski

## **On the Art of Disappearing**

*For my nonverbal son*

They say that Timothy Leary's dying mantra was *Why not? Why not?*

I ask myself the first half of the question at 4:30 a.m., awake for the second time, my conscious mind refusing to move with the natural flow of neurons. I sleep for a few more hours before finishing the documentary. I watch Ram Dass floating off the coast of Hawaii, buoyed by a life jacket and the love of his caretakers.

I put a tray of red potatoes in the oven. I toss the molded tomatoes, the eggplant I'll never use, the pepper whose skin is growing suspiciously dimpled. I slice an apple and the one remaining pepper. I ask you to forgive me as you eat, your mouth contorted with rage. All you understand is that I've disappeared another father.

When the canal restoration project is finished, I'll air up the tires and charge the lights, hopeful that you'll remember the commands. I can almost feel our eyes watering from the dry sting, my belly churning with nerves, the shoulder just wide enough to break our fall.

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I wonder about the sand in the life jacket, the point at which anything becomes ineffective. I wonder about the day you wandered through Encinitas, moving vaguely in the direction of the beach.

The aloneness rattles around the house, cracking the mason jars, gutting the drywall. I wonder if the death rattle is an object as well as a sound. I remember what the last death felt like. My knees collapsing into the kitchen tile. Your dinner searing in

the pan. How pain takes up residence in your body, cohabitates with your cells, manifests in your skin and breath. Mostly, the sensation in your head, the one that feels like the dance of a thousand electrodes.

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You've started twirling the cat's tail, and she's grown accustomed to you, maybe even fond. She sits in your lunchbox when you're not looking.

All I ever wanted was for you to have a person that was yours. I'm not sure you've ever understood the word *friend* let alone the concept, but when you press the button that says *M's car*, I know that you understand desire, what it's like to have something you love go missing.

I think about the time I locked you outside, watched you scream on the patio as I plugged my ears with my fingertips. For the first time in years, I heard the ocean inside my head.

The first time M took you to the ocean, you ebbed and flowed through the afternoon. There was power in every crest and trough, in the energy of your unlikely connection.

One summer, you lost your iPad at a gas station between Yuma and Dateland. You covered your eyes for miles, unable to speak or gesture. When we got home, you guided M back to the van, begging him with your eyes. *It's gone, buddy*, he said. *It's gone.*