

The Day

Some parts of those moments I see clear as a photograph, and others blurry, like a smeared watercolor painting. Some I can't shake away, and others I grasp at in dreams sometimes. I think of it as The Day, but truthfully, it only lasted for a few fleeting, endless minutes. They are my moments of fear.

The snow, though mostly gone, lingered in pockets and hollows in the ground on one of those damp January days on the edge of cold. The thick curtain of clouds coating the sky let down a few heavy mists that clung to the ground. I curled up on a brown chair in the living room window, scratching away in my journal. Abraham and Andrew sparred back and forth, growing increasingly frustrated. Upstairs, Mom and Rachel worked away at their desks. Vaguely I heard the steady whine and thud of the treadmill from the backhouse, where Paul and Grace exercise. The racket ceased when Grace moved to the exercise bike. I sighed. In the next moment the backhouse door slammed opened, its spring shrieking.

“Mom, there's something wrong with Grace!” Since Paul suffered frequent bouts of extreme excitement and sadness, it took me several seconds to process what he bellowed up the stairs. By the time I hurled down my notebook and dashed towards him, Mom had already thundered down the steps and into backhouse. It's funny – I clearly remember the sound of the pages fluttering around their spiral binding, and the peculiar crunch when the notebook landed, permanently creasing the cover. Mom screamed from the backhouse, her voice panicked, “Somebody call 9-1-1!”

Mom doesn't scream. She just doesn't. Instantly adrenaline pumped into all our systems. I turned slowly to the phone. That is, I whipped around, but my mind encased the next few moments in slow motion. I punched in the numbers and my finger hovered over the call button. Every safety lecture I ever watched flashed through my head. I knew this qualified as an emergency, but I just couldn't quite push that plastic square. I turned to Rachel and shoved the phone into her outstretched hands. My fingers visibly trembled and my whole body quivered. I slid into a sitting position against the cabinet. “Oh Lord – Jesus please help us, what is happening?” The prayer in my mind came jumbled and disjointed and my breathing was jerky. I took deep breaths, trying to calm

myself. “Grace...” The oldest kid in our family, Grace always chased Andrew around the house. What had happened? “Lord is it with her head? All her migraines? What is going on with my sister?”

Our neighbor, Mr. Sampson, appeared moments later in police uniform and ran into the backhouse. We kids milled around, alternating between snapping at each other and long hard hugs. I crept through the length of the house into the backhouse and caught one quick glimpse. I see Grace crystal clear, but can barely see the adults kneeling beside her. “Hello Grace,” Mr. Sampson said, as though he didn’t expect a response.

Randomly, her head swung up, mouth wide open, jaw slack. I saw black stuff smeared all around her eyes before her head flopped back. I’d always pictured drunken people that way and laughed, but the memory still frightens me. I rushed back out, unable to cry. The ambulance people came, and I can see snatches of the stretcher bearers and their focused expressions in my mind. They pulled away, and we dashed to the windows to watch them leave. My view suddenly blurred, but the misting rain had stopped. I wiped away the steam on the window with sharp, angry strokes, but my vision clouded even further. “Oh Jesus, help her, help us all.”

And so my moments of fear—The Day—ended.