

God Has a Plan for Me

By: Amanda Snook

It was the summer my mother broke my hip.

I was working at the Hess station, the AC was out and the slushie machine was broke, which was okay because it meant no one would find out that Beam kept his chewing tobacco behind it. We called him Beam because whenever I saw him outside of work he always kept a bottle of Jim Beam stuffed between his crotch, open and bitter in the Texas heat, and he always fidgeted with it with in his hands, thumb stuck in the top, lips curved around the side, but never once in two years did I see him drink it.

The mechanics were in to fix the slushie machine and Beam watched, itching to get back to the compartment in the back where he kept his chew and he kept glancing in the direction of the mechanic's sweaty ass crack, biting his lip and waiting for his stash to be discovered and for the manager to tell his mother when she came to get both him and her evening cigarette fix. He bit at his yellow nails. Fidgeted. Waited.

It was the summer my mother broke my hip, the summer someone entered the Hess station, five minutes after my shift, long after Beam hid in the back with the pork rinds and the rest of the unwanted things and to stuff his cheek with chew like some kind of tobacco-addicted squirrel, an hour after the mechanic went home for the day.

Ma said the gun wasn't even loaded, but somehow Beam still lost an eye.

It was the summer my mother broke my hip, sixteen and six months when I got out of the car to switch sides and she hit the gas when she went to side over to the passenger side, and as I lay on the asphalt, my bones all shattered, I thought of ambulances and Beam

and beer and the rosary around my mother's rearview mirror and the sweat on the mechanic's ass crack.

I had to quit my job and I was in a wheelchair for six months. Soon after Beam's mom called to tell me that fall that Beam was dead. He was drinking that night and he learned too far out of he friend's car window. Snapped his neck. He hit the sign so hard his body was ripped right out of the car. Killed him real quick, she said. My condolences, Mrs. Beck. I'm real sorry. Yeah, yeah, I'll tell Ma. We'll send something over. We'll keep you in our prayers.

At school all the boys would fight for who got to leave class early and roll me around the halls. Carry my books. Take me up the elevator and jump before we reached the top so I almost toppled over in my crutches. "Who doesn't love a girl that can't run away?" they always said. Everyone wanted to hear about the caseworkers at my door but it was an accident, just an accident. I told them she was teaching me how to drive and forgot to put in in park. Stupid, stupid, yes I know, what a stupid way it would have been to die.

The truth was that the caseworkers found it in her drawers, in the backseat of our SUV, in her urine and on her breath. I found it in her rages, her sallow yellow skin, the money disappearing from my piggy bank, the PlayStation she got me last Christmas, sold off for a few bucks. I said nothing because she was in rehab now, shhh, it's okay, mama's gonna get all better for you, God's got a plan for us. Keep moving; keep moving until it's through. Besides, if I told someone she was using again, Ma would loose her license and then what? I'd take the bus? I wouldn't be caught dead there even if I manage to hobble up the little metal stairs. I had a reputation to upkeep.

I had never been a point of interest before.

Beam had been the only one who ever said hi to me in the hallways.

The pain was almost worth it.

His name was Bobby.

He stuck around when my news was old news and another poor soul was yanked into the spotlight. He was with me when I wobbled around my crutches like Bambi on ice.

I thought he liked me. I thought he was my friend.

Truth or dare?

Dare me to skip class.

Dare me to go into the boy's locker room.

Truth or dare?

The truth is that Bobby unzipped his pants.

It wasn't a dare anymore.

What could I have done? Running was out of the question. I could have screamed but who would have heard? Even if they did, what would it have looked like?

I shouldn't have been there in the first place. Everyone knew that Bobby was my friend. Teachers would get involved. Parents. Lawyers, maybe. The shame would never end.

I thought of Beam. His neck snapped across a stop sign. Did he even see it coming? Did he even have time to be afraid? I'd never even seen him really drink.

I thought of the cries of the cows screaming in the summer, missing their calves. I thought of the boys playing paper football in the hallway my first year in sex ed, while all the girls sat inside with worksheets labeled "HOW TO AVOID DATE RAPE."

I thought of him long after I could walk. Long after people stopped talking about Beam The Dead Boy and the robber that almost blinded him.

I was not a very sympathetic victim. I did not raise my chin in defiance. I did not cry and run to the police. I went to English class. I ate lunch. I struggled up the stairs and I took the bus home. I let the shame silence me.

I didn't want to be in the spotlight anymore.

Bobby said he wouldn't tell. But I knew.

I knew from the stares I got in the hallways. The notes in my locker that never ended. I knew from the way that teachers sent me to the nurse for my too short skirt that I'd worn before without issue. I knew from the way that the boys never talked to me anymore, and few boys that did acted like my body was a couch left on a front lawn to rot with a sign out front that said: FREE TO A GOOD HOME, PLEASE TAKE and they were negotiating a time to haul me into the back of their dad's pick-up trucks.

I knew because of Candy.

She was Beam's friend. Three years older than him. Probably his alcohol supplier. She had a kid already who lived with her mother and she was always loud. She'd dropped by her alma mater to make sure she cried the loudest at the assembly where they told everyone how Beam had died and lectured us about the dangers of alcohol while the entire student body drifted away, eyes glazed over, already thinking about their next kegger. She had a cigarette between her teeth more often than not, and she coughed like she was dying.

After I was back on my feet, I couldn't handle going back to the Hess station. I applied for a job at the local KFC and she interviewed me. I started that Monday.

Candy sang when she worked. She told me a lot of wild stories that seemed to be fake on her smoke breaks, which I started taking with her because I was lonely even though I thought it stank. She talked about the time she and her best friend gave each other

matching tattoos while they were high (she wouldn't show me, so either it was bad or didn't really exist). How her dad was a pilot and he loved her a lot but he couldn't spend a lot of time with her before he died in a plane crash (which she told me wasn't his fault because he was the best damn pilot in the whole world).

We were out back one Sunday that summer, doing the monthly cleaning of the shed freezer. Candy was chewing tobacco and I was stacking boxes of frozen chicken and checking the expiration dates (Candy told me they were all expired, the freezer was old and they had a new one indoors, so I might as well just pretend to clean it and let it be someone else's problem). Candy kept moving from inside to outside as she got too hot and then too cold, but didn't even bother looking busy, instead she sat on the boxes and painted her toenails while I worked. She was singing again, her voice raspy, and coughing on all the boxes.

"So," Candy coughed more than spoke "a little birdy told me your mom's in the hospital again. That's rough, kiddo. I'm sorry."

I shrugged. In the hospital for the last time, they said. They don't give shiny new cars away to people who run over their kids and put a dent in the bumper. And they don't give grand spankin' new livers to people who do meth either.

"You behave for her now," Candy said, lighting up a cigarette, her toes freshly painted and propped up on a shelf. There was already a dried piece of grass stuck to the wet paint of her big toenail. "You stay away from them boys. Don't you go ending up like me."

I am, I told her, I promise.

“That’s not what I heard,” she said, taking a drag and watching the smoke rise to the ice-covered roof of the freezer, where it dispersed in rings like the ash from her cigarettes falling into a puddle. Did she sneer? Or did I imagine it?

And what the fuck did you think you heard?

Nothing, she assured me, and she grinned a big Cheshire cat smile and she leaned back and closer her eyes. There was something skunky about the smoke. She was high, she must have been.

*SHUT UP! SHUT UP! SHUT UP!* I wanted to scream, wanted to slam her melon-round little head into the shelves, watch her hold her face on her knees and feel the way that I had felt.

Do to others what you would have them do to you.

Do to others what had been done to *me*.

But instead I left. I locked the freezer door behind me. I never heard her fists slam on the walls. I left her in that cold darkness.

I went inside and told the manager Candy hadn’t felt well and left for the day, which earned me a grumble since Candy was usually flakey like that. Then I asked, please sir, won’t you let me go too? My Ma’s in the hospital, sir. They say she ain’t got much longer. Yes, sir. Thank you, sir.

I took the bus out to close to where Ma was staying and hitchhiked the rest of the way. Her skin was yellow and her eyes were rolled back to the wooden cross fixed up above her bed, courtesy of one of the nurses that assured me she would help her find God again in her last few days. Please, the woman couldn’t even find the gearshift.

I took her hand and I confessed it all. She did not speak, but I knew what she would say.

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