

Abby Stiffler

I Go Back to Christmas 2002

i see them sitting
against a grey backdrop
in a room meant for pictures.
i see them posed in a perfect and pretty position,
arms around each other and hands folded together.

it's a comforting look, but it is not comfortable.
it is not comfortable to know that soon, things will change.
their smiles will fade, no longer
showing off pearly whites,
but dulling ivories.

her strands of dark hair will be cut
off, along with her dreams.
his waist will grow
larger, along with his guilt.

her round eyes will see so much more than they should,
and her tiny ears, tucked behind thick hair, will not
hear what they need. i want
to warn them, to let them know that their yellow brick road is
soon going to turn to the color of ink.

i want to run up and throw the camera down.
tell the photographer to stop, that this isn't natural, this isn't real.

but i don't.

some sort of unity was formed as they carried their burden together.
never would they have guessed it, but it did.
they are a cracked mirror, staying together because there is less debris
than if they all fell apart.

i want to go up to the little girl with her hands so nicely on her knees.
i want to grab them and hold them and never let go.
even if the unknown **is** unknown.

She will be here.

They will be together.

And I will have to watch.

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Imaginary Friend

“Am not!”

“Are to!”

“No! I don’t have any imaginary friends. Those are for *babies!*”

Ruby is forgetting me. Well, she’s not forgetting me. She’s leaving me. What’s wrong with me?

Is it because I stole Kit Kittredge’s spot at the dinner table? Because I spilled the tea at the tea party? Maybe because I cut her bangs and made Mom mad?

“Ruby is a baby! Baby Ruby, baby Ruby!”

The girls all tease her. They are absolutely ruthless.

Ruby steps back, gripping my hand.

“Go away!” she shrieks. I do not know if she is talking to me or to the girls.

Ruby runs to the slide and huddles underneath the scratched plastic. She makes a small circle of gravel around me.

“You’re not real, you’re not real, you’re not real,” she fiercely whispers. The gravel is piercing my feet, but I don’t move. I try to grab her hand again, but she tears it away.

“No!”

“Ruby, please,” I beg, “I love you. Remember when we painted the dog’s nails? And when we snuck an extra popsicle when Mom wasn’t looking? What about the time when we put our face under the water for the first time at the pool?”

She won’t look at me. The girls are laughing on the swings and throwing leaves in our direction.

Ruby kicks the circle of gravel at me and runs away. I cannot move without her. I am not real without her. So I sit under the slide and wait.

To give this eager figure that I
Wish knew how hard I have actually tried. She is staring at me, so I open my mouth, but I don't
think

That it's worth anything, so I keep tapping. I tap not for
Her, but for me.

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The Bubblegum Building is Me

I am from question marks and tears,
Bubblegum buildings filled with tiny humans.
I am crib-lined walls and many 'māmās' cooing.
I am from luck, loss, and lullabies (and hopefully love).

I am a choppy-tongued city with four tones
And 6 hundred thousand faces.
I am from an eggshell shooting star which flies
Me from my motherland to another land.
I am anxious air in a calm courtroom granting citizenship
(With a side of replacement).

I am tough-love and a should've-but-wasn't world.
I am from report cards, book fairs, and hawks that paint the sky blue.
I am keys A through G and passionate words which make up glorious art for the ears.

I am from promises and quotes that soothe and scare.
I am intimidating and daunting words like
'High functioning depression' and 'acute anxiety.'
I am from a pit of darkness that seems inescapable
(And a ladder made of orange bottles and expensive listeners.)

I am raw nails, bleeding skin, and indented fingers from twisting and pulling.
I am from ideas and adventure that have no limits.
I am disappointment; no, I am failure.

I am from crippling stress laced with endless support.
I am empathy, compassion, and inspiration.
I am from an existential crisis that screams 'why am I here?!'
At the top of its flame-red lungs; its massive, enraged uvula hanging
Over its frigid heart like a head in a guillotine that's ready to close-
Tantalizingly close to The Final Surrender.
I am creature comforts and smells that become home.
I am from damp soil with seeds strewn about, waiting to bloom.

I am laughter deep within and a withering faith in humanity.

I am from control and structure, living on a basis of need-to-know;

There is no such thing as 'go with the flow.'

I am the black sheep, the duck in the henhouse.

I am from rituals, rebellion, and the refusal to settle.

I am emotion.

I am from overthinking, overdoing, overpowering, overanalyzing, overwhelming, overreacting...and underestimating.

I am rough-drafts, letters, (in both senses of the word), and maps.

I am from worry stones, the smooth rock, and perfect pebble searching.

I am florentines, crinkles, and worms 'n dirt.

I am from the summit on the last day of summer.

I am almonds, bananas and something exotic swirled together in a mistake

That forms the word "chink."

I am from whos, whats, wheres, and whys-

The support blocks that make up the eggshell star.

I am the bubblegum building.

