



"You can't tell me to shut up. If I'm wrong tell me why." I could tell she was annoyed, but I was on a roll. I was electric.

My mother's voice softened. "Honey, this has been upsetting for all of us."

"Don't change the topic." I kicked my wheelchair hard. My heel throbbed. My mother winced but said nothing.

"Disabled people are useless," I commented.

She looked at me incredulously. Her tawny reddish hair and freckles made her look innocent, but she's no saint.

"I'm just saying you have to, at least as a theoretical possibility, accept that we *might* be useless."

Her jaw dropped. She looked at my mangled legs with pity. Then she turned back to her dishes and squirted 'sea breeze essence' dish soap from a clear plastic bottle onto a blue plastic scrub brush. The dishwasher was on, humming its mechanical hum, but she was washing the grimy, disgusting ones by hand.

"You may *feel* useless sometimes, Sammy. But you're not."

"You think it's unacceptable to think we're useless. So, you can never know for sure whether you think we're useful because we really are, or because you're not letting yourself accept the truth."

"I don't think any of God's creatures are useless."

"Mom, *all* humans are useless. We don't live sustainably. We drink from plastic straws once. Once! And before you know it, dead and decaying fish with straws in their swollen guts are washing up by the millions to putrify the shoreline."

My mother sighed, and then pursed her lips. I started drawing her, emphasizing the lines around her mouth and the billowness of her hair.

"I wish there was a way to casually work my disability into my artist statement," I said. "These days they won't give you a gallery showing unless you're the queer, cis-trans, biracial founding member of the Oojidabooja First Nation. That's as it should be, of course. But just saying. When the pendulum swings, it swings." I looked up from the pencil I was dangling uncommittedly above a blank sheet of paper. "Hey, don't move! Hold that position for a sec, I love the determined look on your face as you scrub that pot.

My mother scrubbed more aggressively.

"The more of us die, the better off this planet will be," I commented.

She rolled her eyes.

"It's not even just how we live. It's how we think. How we're made."

I was thinking of the exquisitely, flawlessly beautiful kids at my high school, with their compromised immune systems and brittle bones (over-processed food), and fragile egos (over-processed lives).

The dishwasher moved on to a more grating phase of its inexorable process.

"You wanna know why Logan killed Sonya and those other people and then killed himself?" I was speaking louder to be heard above the dishwasher.

She glowered but tried to suppress it with a veneer of phony concern. "Sammy, you know, he was disturbed. It happens."

"It's because he was walking up by the forest and a giant excavator was digging up the hillside and a little marmot stuck its head out of the dirt and stared at him in sheer fucking terror like 'what the fuck is going on?' And he said the marmot's whole underground home was probably like just completely torn apart, and his entire marmot family was probably missing. Or dead. And Logan felt sick to his stomach to be a member of the species that's decimating this planet."

My mother was staring at me like I was crazy. For a second, I thought she'd cry. Anything to do with my sister (well, former sister) Sonya upset her. But she was listening.

"He said whenever a new housing development is built he can sense the fear and sorrow of all the trees and wildflowers that were dug up and killed, and all the little ants and grasshoppers and birds that had made those trees their home."

"Logan had a vivid imagination."

"Mom, I'm not doing it justice. He explained it scientifically. When trees are threatened they release chemicals into the air. It's a proven fact. They linger in the air for years. Decades. And there's all kinds of other stuff that goes on, like even detectable changes to the geochemistry of the soil."

"Detectable only to Logan, it seems."

"No, *everyone* detects them! All the time. And it makes us nervous and anxious and fucked up, but we don't know *why*."

My mother's face suddenly lit up. "Look!"

A hummingbird was hovering at the feeder outside the kitchen window, its iridescent wings palpitating in the sunlight like the flutterplants of my era.

My mom's eyes were glassy. "He said that to you?"

"Yeah. Years ago, but it stuck with me."

"So before he... was disturbed."

"Mom! What if the real situation we face today is that most of the human race has to die very soon for this planet to continue to support life? Or else we all die, everyone dies, everything dies. Say that's the case, and according to scientists, by the way, we have every reason to believe it is, so say it is. *Then* who's 'disturbed'? Logan? Is Logan the one who was disturbed?"

The hummingbird was gone. I felt beads of sweat on my forehead. Strands of hair, a more violent shade of red than my mom's, obscured my view. The feeling of my fingers brushing my hair back across my head lingered in a way that was acutely, unnaturally pleasant.

"Sammy, sweetie, we all have different ways of coping, but I don't think that kind of talk is helpful. Be optimistic."

"Fuck optimistic. It's helpful to *me*. Because its *real*." I was shuddering. "I'll tell you what's not helpful. Not letting people talk. Not letting them think. Living in a world of make believe. As if we could all keep driving cars, and wasting water on golf

courses that contaminate the groundwater with pesticides, and drinking from plastic straws, forever.”



The dishwasher noise stopped abruptly, and the only sound was the steady undulation of my diaphanous wings. I was back in my photosynthesizing plant-body scanning pink champagne skies with my optical stamens, looking for a spot to drop roots and grow. No longer trapped to the surface of the planet, trapped indoors, trapped in thoughts.

I don't understand how or why I locked into the awareness of this boy. But, there's one thing of which I am certain: in some subtle way we became entangled, and thereafter he knew—at some level—that someone (me) understood him. And that life continued.

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