

Finalist, Poetry

Summer of Seventeen

By Maria Palacios

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You taught me how to drive
and I taught you how to kiss
although though I was seventeen
and you were twenty-two.

I fell in love thinking
I was learning from you
and I was
and I did.

To me you represented
the crip independence
I wanted to own
the freedom
I wanted to have.

You were the virgin quad
who broke his neck
once upon a sunset
early in his youth.

I was the crippled girl
who at seventeen
had no virginity to give
despite my polio years
despite my scars
and my own
personal wars
with my body.

You were the first
crip lover in my life
the one who taught me to drive
between necking sessions
steamed up windows
and moments of guilt
but you always gave in
to the temptations of my body
even if you went to church
the following Sunday
pretending nothing happened

attempting to forget my lips
the meeting of our mouths,
the buttons of my blouse
which I kept for years
after loving you.
I'm funny with love memorabilia like that.
I keep things for a long time
and then one day let go of them
as if they had never mattered.
Perhaps that's when things become
more personal and more eternal
for they only exist
in our memories.

And memories of us
I have plenty of
like the rainy day I took off
and went to your place
instead of going to school.
We were both such fools
when it came to love
although you swore to not love me
as much as I claimed to love you
at the time.
I was just a girl in your life
who fell in love with the idea of you
and with your car
even after I drove it into a ditch
and never really learned
to drive
without fear.
I was better at teaching you to love
and making love on rainy days
writing poems you read
in silence
and kept folded in your bible
like the good Christian you were.
You so wanted to say no
but my cleavage learned
to swallow your name
and your hands had memorized
the detours of my body.

So there I was...this
seventeen year old girl
driving you mad
and driving your car
and it's not like it was easy
for us.

Making the transfer
to the driver's seat
meant having to deal
with moving our wheelchairs
out of the car
and putting them back
creatively using our abilities,
learning each other's ways
of moving
and trusting
a world not made to accommodate
our needs
not able to understand
our dreams.
Driving for us
meant driving
with hand controls
to then lose control
of ourselves again
kissing
until we swallowed each other's soul
and then try to figure out
how to get back to where we were
so you can drive me home
where I would lie to my mother
and you would lie to yourself
then to your church.

I guess it was
the lying to yourself
what made us grow apart.

You chose to believe
the concept of us
wasn't meant to be
and I guess in some ways
you were right.
But we remain friends
loving the days we shared
in our youth.
And if I could go back in time,
I would get in your car again
and lead you
into the temptation of my lips.
I would have to go back
to seventeen
to want you the same way
and to love you again
like I once did.

Our driving lessons
are now
memories of seventeen
and poems growing
between my fingers
as I think of you.

Thirty years have come and gone
since then
and thirty more might pass
but to me
you will always be
one of my dearest memories
one of my dearest friends
virgin quad I perverted
without knowing.