

Shotgun Silence

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"But I won't go down with this ship, and I won't put my hands up and surrender. There will be no white flag above my door. I'm in love, and I always will be."

Dido's voice siren songs itself from the car radio into our ears, and the small, hanging crucifix hits the dash, becoming the morning's metronome. We like this song, my mom and me. We sit looking straight ahead with no conversation between us. This happens on most mornings, regardless of what the radio plays and whether we like it or not. Our breakfast: engine-powered stillness and radio silence, except, of course, for the actual radio. Sometimes a mother and daughter need to stew in a hot car at 7:30 in the morning. I suppose fathers and sons have fishing.

My eyes switch their focus between the pimpled reflection in the sun visor and the series of red lights ahead, trying to change them both at will. Unlike Dido, we have surrendered... to Miami traffic. This will be my 30th tardy. The one that will grant me a referral. A referral will do two things: exclude you from events like senior prom and prevent you from graduating. How ridiculous is that? It's not like I had a stake in winning prom queen, but graduation?

The cross's steady beat marks the seconds of wasted gasoline. My mom's grip on the steering wheel softens as "White Flag" continues to play, and her unmanicured thumb taps against the hot leather. She is angry in the way that all women are, the way that I am starting to be—angry with a smile. I am tired in the way that all teenage daughters are—tired of being rotten and insecure, feigning self-sufficiency. I scan her face for a hint of emotion, a crack in her demeanor. The dancing

thumb, the only loose thing about her. Today, she will be late for work, like every other day. I suppose they will ask her to pack up her things soon, saying something like "this might fly in Cuba, but not here." Betrayed by anatomy, or perhaps middle age, the unruly grays haloing above her head in the stale AC tell me that she's tired too. Our animosity has aged her. The rap of the wooden cross reminds me that time will continue to pass and take and take.

We used to sing this song loudly with the windows down, way back when I dominated the back seat. Mom would look at me through the rearview mirror and stick out her tongue to make me laugh, and it always did. We laughed at Dido's logic back then too: in not surrendering her love, she is surrendering to love, doesn't Dido know? We are always surrendering.

Our car pulls up to the school's entrance, where other parents are hastily dropping off their kids. Lunchboxes fumble out of car windows like the kisses that are blown after saying, "Have a good day!" The parents in business suits honk for the minivan moms to get a move on, and their kids exit the car dressed in embarrassment. My mom and I, we sit in silence for my turn to leave. I

usually part without a word or a look back to watch her drive off, but today I surrender to time, to punishment; what's another minute if I'm already late? I surrender like Dido and say, "I love you," before slipping out of the car door.