

Pandora and the Minivan

I was in the car when it happened. Some crappy, blue minivan swerved in front of the old man's Lexus from the turning lane when the light changed. We tailed the van about a mile down the highway into CVS's parking lot and angled in front of it when it backed into a spot. The minivan's motor shut off but the damn thing just kept chugging.

I don't have to tell you the words the old man used; on Facebook alone, there are over a million views. He was wearing a Cubs t-shirt torn near the collar even though we don't live anywhere near Chicago. This wasn't to deceive people or instigate a conspiracy or whatever everyone's trying to prove; it was just laundry day. Don't have to tell you where we live either because his name and address were posted on every social media site I know, along with pictures of him and my grandmother and me and even Apollo, the mutt we'd picked up at the Humane Society a week before the incident.

That's what my grandmother calls it, 'the incident.' Her lip quivered when she told me how many Facebook friends she'd lost. "They weren't really your friends anyway," I told her. She nodded, swiping through her pad. I still can't figure out where all those pictures came from. And how they came out so fast.

For me there's 'before' and the time that came 'after.' 'Before' my dad and I are hauling two thirty-pound bags of dog food to the trunk of his car. 'After' feels like mythology class when Pandora couldn't control herself and opened up the box. Unleashed evils to the world. Things you can't live down. Things that scar you for life.

I admit I only said, "Dad," one time when he started tailing them; that was as much of a protest as I could muster. I didn't try to stop him from pulling in front of them

or getting out of the car. What was I going to do, grab him by the arm? Tell him to calm down? Threaten to tell his mom? A kid knows his parent better than that. Besides, the crappy minivan did almost hit us, and I knew by the look on the girl's face in the passenger's seat—one hand on the window and the other reaching to a couple of kids in the back—that someone in the minivan knew it, too.

The old man left the car door hanging open when he stormed out, so I knew he wasn't thinking straight. He banged on the faded-blue hood a few times and started using those words that I don't have to tell you. A couple dozen people marched in front of our hedges the next day, chanting them back at us, and they sounded really awful that way. They sounded bad when the old man began spouting them, too, and even worse when I saw the girl in the passenger's seat holding a phone out the window. My heart speeded up then and I was wishing there was a signal, a safe word I could yell out the window that'd make him stop. It didn't take long before he realized the girl was videoing him, which only made his words more brutal.

After that I focused on the girl. She had these big brown eyes and her fingernails were painted pale blue. I might've guessed she was a freshman like me but didn't imagine that she went to my school or that we both ate in lunch pod C. Turns out they'd just moved into town over the summer, which is why her mother probably made that stupid move in front of our car, because they didn't know where they were going yet. Not that any of that would've changed what happened. The old man doesn't back down.

Eventually, my father stopped spewing his anger at the round-faced woman in the driver's seat and went after the phone in the girl's hand. The driver had to shoulder the door twice before it screeched open. When she clambered out wearing a pink sweatsuit

with big orange flowers and birds across the front, she raised her hands like she was going to give my father a shove or choke him or something. Instead, she slapped all ten chubby fingers with their stacks of silver rings onto the Lexus' hood.

That's when something happened to the old man. His face got a purply-red shade and there were creases and folds where I'd never seen them before and for a moment it was as if the whole world stopped.

It was inevitable. One of us was going to cry.

I was still watching from the car when my father's mouth got squirmy and his face turned wet. I'd never seen my father cry before. He never acted sad about anything. But there he was, standing between the chubby lady in her pink outfit and the girl holding up her phone, crying like a broken dam. I couldn't name what emotion was causing the tears, but I knew it was something dark.

Maybe my face was the same purply-red color when I jumped out of the car, I don't know. I stopped watching the video before the part where I used my arm like a baseball bat so that it knocked the woman's chubby hands off the old man's shiny black hood. She lost her balance and all that pink went down down down, birds and flowers crumpled to the macadam.

The video didn't show the woman hit the ground. "It slides along some car parts and then stops on the sky," my grandmother said. "There are voices screaming and crying in the background, most of them in a foreign language." Who knows what was really said?

There are different online versions as to what happened next. Twitter users mostly say the woman caught me by the heels. Facebook seems to prefer the version where the

old man stumbled and took me down with him. I even saw people credit a rando dog who appeared and jumped at my shoulders and knocked me to the ground.

I remember lying on my back, a gash bleeding above my brow, the despair of Pandora's box spewing all around. Flowers and birds, the old man—who knows? Maybe there really was a dog. All I'm sure of is that I bore witness to that clear blue sky, in real time. And then, above me, her long hair falling. Those brown eyes taking me in.

I shut my own eyes, kept them closed. Held tight to the lid, concealing all hope.