

Reflections, While Sitting in Traffic

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How I remember your voice on the phone but not the last thing I said to you, the last thing you said to me, how I didn't leave my husband, how I went back to Miami last summer and was having tostones at La Granja when I saw your brother sitting there having pollo con papas, how he didn't even recognize me, how he looked older, like a man with a job, how you would be proud to see this man, to know him, how he looked so much like you it hurt to see him sitting there not recognizing me, how your car flew down the Palmetto Expressway doing ninety, your first DUI, your second, your suspended license, those last moments, your eyes your lips your hands your breath your blood alcohol more than three times the legal limit, how I thought *if there is a God, how could there be a God when* on the morning drive to work every day, every damn day having to see and not see and drive past the skid marks and the shattered glass and the pieces of you, of us, all over the concrete, how could there be a God when the only person who knew about me was your brother and now he doesn't even recognize me, sitting there sipping his Coke through a straw and me searching his face and wanting to shake and shake him, because what does it mean to be gone from his memory, to be the only one left to carry this, what's left of us, and how I didn't leave my husband, how once, you and me waiting in line for some roller coaster at the Miami Youth Fair, we joked about dying a tragic roller coaster death and you said, *That's life, Ma, everybody dies*, and I laughed and said, *Not me, I'm gonna live forever*, and you said, *Forever is a long long time*, how after, on my drive to work, I would listen to the morning traffic report on Power 96 and count the accidents, *four-car pileup on the 836 after a motorcycle*, and *southbound lanes closed on the Palmetto Expressway after an overturned vehicle*, and *traffic delays this morning on I-95 after*, how I have not spoken your name in years even though

my sister-in-law unknowingly gave her second baby your name, and every time I see his baby face I think of you, the babies you will never get to name, how that morning, before, after, I listened to the traffic report like any other day, how I sipped my coffee, annoyed at all the rubberneckers making me late for work, how while I was cursing the minivans and the SUVs and the flatbed trucks merging into my lane, you were there, in your car, your eyes your lips your hands your breath your blood alcohol more than three times the legal limit, how once, after, long after, I pulled over on the shoulder of the Palmetto Expressway in the middle of rush hour traffic and asked and asked and asked, *did it hurt were you scared did you tell her did she know did you still love me*, how the world kept on, all the cars on the Palmetto still moving, and everybody just kept living and driving to work, how once, months before I left you for the last time, standing on the quarterdeck of a cruise ship, wind whipping my hair as I sailed away from the Port of Miami, I watched you chase the ship on your Jet Ski, wave-jumping like you had a death wish, and I already knew I would leave you, and after after after, how I was angry and then glad and then angry that your wife or your brother, nobody, ever got one of those *DRIVE SAFELY* memorials on the highway, how there had been a funeral service without me because how could I explain who I was, that it had been you and me for so long, before and after, your brother complicit, his memory sustaining us, how I needed him to see me, how your wife would get to be your wife always, forever, even though forever is a long long time, even though she was already with someone else, before and after, and how I didn't leave my husband, and how your brother, keeper of your secrets, the only time he ever called was to tell me you were gone.