



BLIND GREETING

Xavier Botero started this story to explore his own intellectual deficiencies and finished it convinced that they are at least as profound as he had thought. And because he saw a fat blind girl.

The light was dead. It had died an hour before, Winter Sun having had its say on the length of days. Darkness was not so dominant, though, that I didn't immediately see her, the blind girl, as I drove around the corner. She was trudging away from

me down the middle of the street, her hand flicking back and forth, her long metal arm feeling the ground, her twilight shadow lengthening, disappearing. Lack of light always fills me with an uncertain despair.

It was not the first time I had seen her; now, for some reason, she caught my eye. She stood out, enveloped by the headlights of the Jeep in front of me and the car coming the other way, and I noticed her, really noticed her, for the first time.

The three converged on the yellow speed

bump. It struck me that the girl didn't know the bump was yellow, that she didn't know the color at all. The sedan on her left eased over the bump. The Jeep on her right did the same. Both had moved on as she carefully placed her right foot up — then over. Then her left foot the same. I proceeded cautiously myself, watching her.

She strolled, seemingly oblivious, though one knows better. Of course she heard the cars passing close; but her portly frame offered neither ground nor resistance. I slowed as I neared her, trying to carefully pass by. But I slowed too much and I knew she had noticed me. My harsh car engine was enough; my window was down and from my car speakers Lennon sang louder than I'd ever heard him. Then, I opened my mouth, though I don't know why.

"How long have you been blind?"

I didn't say it to make conversation, and my tone didn't pretend it. I said it as a former self: the child on the windy, chilly streets of San Francisco, noticing a bum

grasping a gray tabby, its magnificently stiff countenance and shock-stained eyes confessing its death, and in his hands the sign — spare some food for Kitty. I asked the question now, and I almost drove away. She answered before I could, and without turning her head.

“All my life.”

“Ah. OK. Sorry.” I apologized only for having bothered her and she knew it.

“It’s OK.”

Again, the impulse to drive away worked itself muscle to tensed muscle from my neck to my feet. It took a great deal of restraint, but impending shame can be quite strong. I could feel her about to speak again and it wasn’t within my power to drive away. So I kept my creeping wheels corralled and waited for her.

“You know,” she said, “my parents didn’t tell me I was blind —”

“No?”

“In fact, they never told me anything was wrong with me. I didn’t realize it till I was eight or nine. I had one of those moments


when all of a sudden it all clicks, and your mind’s overwhelmed, and you feel like dying just to see what comes next. I’m blind, but it’s not like I mind. I’ve tried to imagine what seeing’s like, if that’s what you want to know. But I am who I am.”

That was all I wanted to know. But her words echoed through my thoughts for the rest of the evening. Deadlines forced me to work on the next year’s edition of holiday cards, and I ground my eyes into the slowly blurring print. I started with triolets as always. They dropped flat. I tried the reliable sonnet. No good. I got creative, trying villanelles and limericks; then free verse, moving from quatrains to tercets to couplets. Delving deep down in my heart, /The love I feel for you turns into art was the evening’s

apex. It’s the moment’s fault, I told myself, it’s her words continuing to rise to the foreground of my thoughts, ever reaching for me.

The cards, the indecision were the same as the night before, and all nights back for many a month. Her words became allies, reinforcements really, to my hesitation, my doubting soul. Eventually, as always, I abandoned the table, leaving it strewn with impossible rhymes. I pushed my chair back and rubbed red my truculent, traitorous eyes.

I opened them again, but couldn’t see more than a few feet, just the fuzzed outlines of furniture in the midnight room.

And no way to turn on the light. 

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