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Across the Universe

Mindy Lukens

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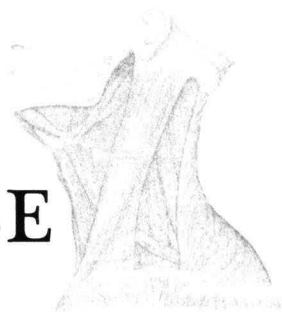
Mindy Lukens

ACROSS THE

THERE IT GOES, that sick feeling in my stomach. The hair swarming all over my face, the heightened pulse and the realization that that was just a fragment. And I blink, and then begin. Truthfully I don't care about BMWs or lonely sunsets, I don't even care about the hair that is still covering my face. Hiding, leaving the pulse and thumping to the traffic and sliding and jumbling of cars, in my own universe, where I exist, you see. You don't? Ok good, I'll talk about carpet instead.

He said he wanted it shaggy brown, like the seventies or something. Something every guitar-playing hippy wanted. Long—underestimating the accumulation of dirt possible. The carpet moved back and forth in my open ears and told me stories of vacuuming with two kids in my mother arms.

UNIVERSE



Back and forth, cleaning out all that dirt, covering it up with rugs and his guitar and spilled mugs for a lying mouth—not clutter on a desk.

Sleek brown porcelain circling upwards to my dusty pencils. I got him a mug. Yeah, that's right, I studied abroad and put down five pounds on something that breaks. Its soft, tan color lingers to a distinguished brown, the type of thing I could see covered in peppermint tea. He wanted one with the Beatles. I wanted him to be a man, so I bought the tan mug with the brown rim. The kind that a child couldn't wrap their hands around, and that if put on the top shelf would have to come down gently and with a serious mind. He would sip that mug every morning, and he would be my man, the soft brown protector and the safe cradle

to my porcelain.

So he left me. Doesn't make sense, right? Yeah, an email sent to say goodbye doesn't. It wouldn't be human to say that it didn't matter and that all I wanted to do was lie upside down and move home to the hills of sanity.

Los Angeles makes sense. It just does. The traffic makes sense. It jumbles and weaves but eventually you know you are going somewhere and everyone else is too. You even know why everyone else is going at it the same, because that is when work ends. Work, I guess like making phone calls and talking in person. And leaving work makes sense.

I was left, which is worse than broken. Broken at least has pieces, left is one social scene of peeking smirks and quick eyes. Los Angeles has a lot of fakes. I mean, a lot of people just walk down the street and think they are broken. They want to be broken because their clothes are pieces, Rembrandts that smell like cocaine. Torn from the something other than the truth, because you know they bought them that way. Even their expressions pull from the gravity they didn't discover. You know, wherever I am, I think about Andrew. And he wasn't even the one I bought the bloody mug for. He's not from Los Angeles; he's too real and broken.

I got the hippy's email in Spain. A place with breezes of gelato, white linen pants, ruffles in a flag—and me—in a dry bathtub, holding on to slippery porcelain, and praying to breathe. And I stayed there, all day, all night, with no further illusions of safe hands lifting a mug for adults.

Ok, maybe I do care about BMWs, but who doesn't really? I mean, they are safe and reliable and German. That was probably the problem. He wasn't German. Einstein didn't lie. I'm pretty sure Hitler did though. So maybe relation to Germany wasn't the kicker, or in this case the breaker.

I stayed there in that bathtub overseas and in bedrooms and white walls and mountains majesty. And I don't know why I started with this. Maybe it's because I'm scared. So I died. Fair enough to say. And then—the snow fell and the wind blew and the porcelain became shallow, shallow enough for me to slip out of and into. A lifeless ordinary, is that the phrase they use?

So you see everything became paint; probably something like oils, something that slides, or glides, on ice. Something that spun so fast it didn't know what it was doing. Ok so that spinner, that's me, and this story—it has to do with Andrew, ok? I said it didn't, but I'm from Los Angeles so that makes me a liar (and the spinning was my heart).

So it spun and, well, I guess he slowed it down didn't he? And cradled it softly back to me, peace. That's when I loved him, for being soft and sailing through my breeze.

The kind of breeze that wrinkles your hands because you feel it slipping up your fingertips chasing freckles from too many lonely sunsets that you pretend not to care about. That was a fragment.

So I'm alive, that's fair enough to say. I imagine some pumpkin turned to carriage and some mice into horses. He traveled and listened and . . . ok, I'll stop.

And now I'm here, in a hotel room in Boston, wondering how you know, when they sip so carefully and give you that glance, that it's going to be another goodbye. And you move, and you chase, and you throw away that vacuum because this hotel has short carpet and vacancy for thick tongues that aren't broken.

And you know what else makes sense? Well, I'll leave that to you, because I really don't.