

The Jumper

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Often when I say “she” or “you” I mean me.

I mean me when I tell you this story but I will say “you.”

I will generalize. I will refer to the broad category that fits my body. The broad category to which my body belongs, in which it has been placed or can be seen from above. The specifics have long been beside the point. I do not agree to be myself.

Little girls do not jump out of moving cars on suburban streets. There is no reason for it. And there would be no reason to train for this kind of feat unless the imagined future is sufficiently antithetical to the wide private emptiness of the landscape. Little girls do not learn to jump out of cars. But they are so strong, so wiry, so lithe. The physical possibilities are endless.

All you need is a driver—a willing driver. And a jumper. The jumper; she may be four foot six and she may have already been an excellent rope jumper, hop scotch jumper, jumper from lower branches or tops of the slides.

The driver who might be five foot ten starts out slowly—a few miles per hour and the jumper, not yet a jumper, opens the car door and gets comfortable leaning out while it moves increasingly faster.

The driver—laughing and shaking his head, and sometimes holding on to the back of her shirt, drives faster and faster until she feels like she is flying and her hair is blowing back and whipping the sides of her face and she is breathing in the smell of the pavement and the mowed lawns and the gravel and exhaust. She balances on the edge of the seat—barely on the seat, and she is all vision and wind and really not the body—not the jumper—not the little girl at all. She leans all the way out—standing on her toes—just her shirt in his hands, her arm around the car door—her full weight in weightlessness held up by the wind. She looks back at him, at his eyes—the fear and hatred, that inevitable hatred that is pulled toward everything, like gravity.

Someday a man will hold you like this to keep you from flying. It might be the first time a man holds you. You may not be lucky enough to let a man hold you in the way that only he can be hurt. No. The first time a man holds you he might hurt you, simply because of your body. And, when that day happens, you’ll wish you had jumped.

I could have spent the whole day like this—flying like this. But I can’t explain this to you now because you don’t understand your body—maybe you never will. Instead it’s “Do it! Do it dog leg! Jump, straight leg. C’mon faggot. Yeah, girl of steel! C’mon motherfucker. Dogbody. Kid. Punk. Jump. Fly.”

The speed at which she must first exit the car is very slow by contrast to the speed of imagined flight. She can easily land on her feet—or her knees with no difficulty, especially driving by the lawn at the edge of the baseball diamond. But she is still scared she will be run over by the car. Scared she will roll in the wrong direction. At a faster speed her feet will just brush the ground briefly before she rolls and establishes the trajectory of her body away from the moving car. At still faster she will push off from the doorframe as hard as she can and land in a roll. Hands on neck elbows up protecting her head. It is really her skin that tumbles across the grass or gravel or pavement. The skin covering knees, forearms, the backs of hands, her skin revealed in pale white which will later be covered in a red and pink and brown-beaded appliqué, a delicate embroidery in rose that clots.

Jumping could only hurt her body.

The driver says: I am not stopping this car until you jump. I am not turning the radio on unless you jump. We are not going home unless you jump. The bruises you get from not jumping are going to be far worse. So jump. Jump. Jump. Do it! Do it dog leg! The wind sinks into her ears. Fly.

I agree to be myself in mid air.

The day unfolds around you and there are things you just do. You don't want to do them and you can say that in any way you want. Your self as someone who hates waking up at five forty five and hates having to jump out of the car but does it anyway is a self you will meet up with later, in better times. You will still drive fast for it because it acquired a taste for this though habit. You'll give it a little of what it wants and in return it will keep quiet and take care of you.

There was a reason for all of it. Even when they trained us to kill a body with our hands it was just—a body. It's only killing if it's just a body. Murder is when you kill a soul. Killing is permanently ending the body's habit of moving.

She was so small, fragile, especially her hands and it sickened me how easily her body could be damaged. But, she was so small that jumping seemed as though it wouldn't hurt her, that gravity only applied to her body in the same way that it did to an ant or small bug.

The Jumper screams into the rush of air and vision. She laughs. She hops from the car at low speed and is proud that she can keep walking. She hops from the car at low speed jumping out in the opposite direction and does a summersault after walking a few paces. She skids from the car and grates herself from wrist to shoulder, rolls like a wave has sucked and tossed her, dislocates her knee but her face is untouched and after a minute she gets up.

She could do the walk-away forever, The walk away swagger. She could walk away forever. Through the park towards the river.

I taught her to jump, I taught her to take her chances with gravity. I hurt her to teach her about men like you.

If you were smart you would jump. But you don't know what I'm going to do to your body. Just like she didn't know what was going to happen when you were driving her.

Your fingers clutch my forearm the way hers did when she was a child. Your breath is shredded like the t-shirts she jumped in—the t-shirt you sent her home in. Now your body has no choice but to suffer the will of what is stronger.

I could walk away forever.

The specifics have long been beside the point.

I have no contract with these words you have used to create my body.

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