
First Place
Prose Arbuckle Award

2010 - 2011: Never Give an Old Person Green Bananas.

Lynsey Kamine

Driving on rain danced roads down to the funeral home:

Squeeze some lemon and add a pinch of salt. Drink it up, lap it up, but don't spill it on the pieces, on the fragments of disjointed teddy bears scattered on the table. *Start piecing together the edges, then work your way in.* And so I did. *Want to whistle while we work?* But I couldn't; my stubborn lips only blew hollow air, but yours blew with the grace of an orchestra. Teddies finally resurrected under my pursed, trying lips. Next up: marbles. A game of Chinese checkers will decide who gets to pick tomorrow's matinee.

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Bananas, the fruit of your Daily Bread. Mom brought you some towards the end and you said: *Never bring an old person green bananas.* I laughed a chunky laugh because it was funny. Mom didn't get it. And you laughed, even though your body begged you not to, as the cancer laughed in the face of the banana's potassium and dietary fiber. An inside joke.

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With a little tug, all of your teeth came out! They just popped right out like a Jack-in-the-box! "Can you teach me how to do that?" You laughed and told me your secrets. Pull up, shift down, yank a little, shake a little and voila! Pop goes the weasel! And so I pulled and shifted and yanked and shook while you laughed and smiled the toothless grin I so yearned to emulate.

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Nobody laughs at God in the hospital. *I'll see ya later. What am I kidding? I won't see you later.*

Another joke. "Aw, Grandma, don't talk like that." A Marine's son, an aerodynamic engineer with a 12 o'clock shadow and a quiver in his lip leaned over you, and you told him: *Thanks for coming, now get back out there.* Let the young move on, we have yet so much to do.

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My hair, newly blond and your meadow, freshly painted and framed just for me – for the brunette me who had once picked you poison sumac from the field behind your house. With my prize in hand, I marched through the field, ran past the barn – Lady woof woofed, but I didn't even stop to pet her – then I slammed the screen door on my heels, and climbed the stairs to find you in the kitchen. *Oh my God, go wash your hands! Oh, Lynsey, use lots of soap!* And so I lathered and scrubbed between tears, though I could see you smiling in the bathroom mirror.

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Tangle me up in your arms and let's rock on this porch swing until the chains break and we slam into the pavement. You'll spoon pecan ice cream into your dentures, and I'll clang the silver between my incisors, but we'll both shiver the same goose pimples as we hang over the Astroturf, swinging to the rhythm of our own pendulum.

*Rain danced roads turned to iced ballrooms, as Grandpa took me close.
He was the first to hold me when I was born.*