

Twenty-two Days Before the First One Hundred Days

The first camera I recall holding was the Polaroid Land Camera, that old grey mare, the Highlander, with its rare roll film that developed in the back, but I wouldn't have known that then, what I knew, when I was five, was how to fondle the black vinyl bellows that protected the light as it flew from lens to caught frame, how to slide the Chrysler-chrome hood of the aperture along its metal track, out to the world to see something, then back into the steel case, click, where seeing clear would be closed down and kept so safe, the ivory dial with its red and certain arrow choosing between two shutter speeds. Henry Dreyfuss. He designed it. 1954. One year on and Dreyfuss, who would before he killed himself at love's height in a suicide with his dying wife give us the Bell phone, the John Deer tractor, the Westclox alarm clock that sent us each into those needful morning shifts, before he spent his whole life lifting a little elegance into our half-lived twentieth-century, he wrote his opus, *Designing For the People*, the people!—the dream that part of any machine's purpose was to be human experience. It's New Year's Eve, eve, again, I'm in a LaQuinta Inn in Macon, Georgia. I don't know how to say out loud the count of Confederate flags I saw on the way here. Sold out, they put me in a smoking room fashioned in cheap contemporary with two bowed beds and my dog keeps itching. I'm driving back from Christmas with my mom, who moved to Florida once she got rid of us, who lived her happy life there, who this week asked which of her rings I want when she dies. I don't want her to die. I don't want Carrie Fisher to die or Debbie Reynolds to die a day after Carrie Fisher dies. I don't want my mom to know who Debbie Reynolds is and me to know who Carrie Fisher is and for neither of us to know who the other is talking about. I don't want 2017 or 2016. The ball has dropped a hundred times: Prince and Bowie, Leonard Cohen, the Wizard of Woo, Gwen Ifill, Phife Dawg, Dr. Stanley, Christenberry, Eli Wiesel, Tupac's mom, my boss's Grandado, Ali, democracy, for Christ's sake, Dreyfuss! Save us! The rapture is on and all the elegant ones are leaving. Build something, a worthy thing for which they'll want to stay, build a way for us to see clear through this our winter of disconnect, build a steel case to click. I want two speeds. Dials to turn. I want the human experience of metaphor and not a metaphor of experience. I want the ruby and diamond gold estate ring on my mom's hand, her hand in mine, the two of us walking into a store to look at bobbles, so pretty, that we will not buy.

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