Lombardi's on the Bay [1]

February 17, 2016 Flash Nonfiction [2]

Flash Nonfiction by Lauren Grabowski

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The moment I opened the invitation to the baby shower, I recalled Lombardi's on the Bay was a restaurant you'd been to. With her, obviously. Images flashed through my mind like microfilm, coming to a rest on the picture of you two at a wedding, both wearing sunglasses. She had a lace shawl on her slender shoulders. You had on a lavender tie. Posed, smiling. A candid of you two, slow dancing.

Did you RSVP to Jamie's shower? my sister asked.

Not yet, I replied.

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Are you gonna go?

Usually, I skip family gatherings in Long Island. I despise the traffic. But I'd yet to meet my cousin's girlfriend and wanted to before she had the baby. I tell my sister yes. *I've heard the restaurant is nice.*

A few mornings later, driving to work, on the phone with you: I tell you I'll be in Patchogue. Mention Lombardi's on the Bay. You say you've been there, oblivious to the fact that I already know that. I remember everything. *You're going to pass my exit on your way there.* More talk of geography. I can hear you smiling. I bet you can hear me smiling back. Hearing you smile. It's moments like these that are as familiar as holding hands or moving in synchronicity under the bed sheets, things normal couples do. But we hardly ever did those things. Our moments are unconventional. Most of the time this tricks me into thinking they're special. Acknowledging that I share you with someone else stings too much.

My mom asks me what I want to buy Jamie for a shower gift. I tell her I don't care, just let me sign my name on the card. Later, she tells me to write her a check for $33. I don't want to spend a penny on Jamie. I've never met her, and she isn't even 21 years old yet.

Driving down the LIE, I mention to my family you've been to the restaurant before. Interest is feigned at the mention of your name, or so I assume. They've never met you; you're just the name of someone they know I used to date. My cousin asks who you are. I sit up and tell my version of the story. *We're still really good friends,* I say.

Almost an hour goes by. Eventually, I pass your exit. I snap a photo and text it to you. I get a text back with a blue heart. The blue heart means one of us is sad yet still loving. I send a purple heart text back. Those mean I love you more than anything. At least that's what it means to me.

I text: *What are you doing?*

Reply: *Nothing just watching TV*.

That's what you always say when you're home. I assume it's to make me feel like I'm not missing anything special. It doesn't make me feel that way.

At the shower, I sit at a table with all my cousins. Food is served. There is tasteless out-of-season tomato, delicious cheese. Fried calamari. Homemade marinara sauce. Some texting: *The sauce here is really good*.

Seconds pass. *Well it's not like the name of the place is Goldberg's on the Bay*.

Presents get opened slowly. My family and I talk in the way we have since we were little kids. They're all moms, half of them on second marriages. We wonder how long this shindig will last. I ask the table: *If girls know before they have kids that baby showers are the worst, then how come when it's time to throw their own, they're just as boring as everyone else's?* My cousin Debbie says it's to pay back all the mothers who made them sit through theirs.

I want to go stand outside and take pictures of the sun setting over the bay. I want to post them online. I want you to see what I'm seeing. I want to stand where you stood. But it's too cold; I can barely open the heavy door; the wind is too strong. Instead, I frame a perfect shot through the window: Seagulls walking on frozen water. For a few seconds, I am entirely alone.

I walk back over to my seat. The waiter comes over with a big piece of white cake. I look him in the eye and say with confidence, *No. Thank you*.

Art Information

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Lauren Grabowski is currently an undergraduate at Montclair State University working on a bachelor’s degree in English Literature. She is addicted to iced coffee and spends her time in cafes reading and working on her forthcoming novella, *Life Is Weird.* “Lombardi’s on the Bay” is her first publication credit. She lives in Montclair, New Jersey.

For more information, visit Lauren Grabowski’s website [4].

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