

## Cuts

[A woman is filing past an open casket at a funeral. She walks past the coffin, pauses, keeps walking, and steps off to the side. A few moments pass and she returns again to the side of the coffin.]

[Looking around to make sure she is alone, then addressing the corpse:]

I don't have any important memories. I have a bunch of stupid memories.

Do you remember we would go out on the lawn in the summer in the evening? We used to twirling around on the front lawn, we'd hold hands and lean back and spin around and then fall down on the grass and lie there panting and feel the lawn bob and bow like a sailboat.

One night, though, you weren't there—I think you were inside watching television—and so I was on the lawn by myself with my nightgown inside out. It's one of the things I remember now, and you weren't even there.

Since I was by myself, I stuck my arms straight out at my sides and started to spin alone, and when I was impossibly dizzy I tumbled on the grass, rolled over on to my back, and lay still on the lawn looking up and thought, "None of this will last forever." I ran back into the house and suddenly everything there looked so small, like a playhouse full of toy furniture. Mom was peeling an orange at the dining room table and Dad was sleeping in his armchair with the *TV Guide* in his lap.

I knew you were going to die then, but I guess I forgot. Well, death is a lesson you learn and then you forget over and over again.

[She pauses, then continues in a different vein.]

For God's sake, sis, your hair is orange. It's *not even* orange – the tips are orange, and the roots are five shades of brown. It looks awful. In September you said you were going back to blue. I kept telling you to just let it rest, you can't bleach your hair every three weeks, just let it alone. That's why your hair gets so brittle and clumpy, with all those broken ends around your face.

[Increasingly agitated]

You need to fix your hair. You can't wear that awful color the rest of her life.

[She looks around, panicked.] I have to do something – [as she talks, she begins to pace around, and then to look around the room, walking away from the coffin and then back again repeatedly]

You are going to be so mad, for everyone to see your hair like that, before you've had a chance to fix it. Everyone's here, you know. You look ridiculous. Why didn't they do something about this – at the home? That is their *job*. That is what people pay them for. They washed your hair, they didn't set it right, the side is funny, it's all flat. And they pulled

it away from your face, you know, it only makes it worse. You're so thin, your cheekbones... I don't think they *did* anything, I don't know what we pay people for.

[Still searching the room] The whole thing is so *cheap*. Brian was here, you'll be glad to know, sitting in the very back and wearing a cheap black suit with brown deck shoes. You certainly knew how to pick them. Brian didn't even get up and say anything. Dad got up and read some awful poem you would have hated. Some people from Starbucks came down and a lot of random people – your landlord, Mrs. Nelson from junior high, your old sponsor.

Why the hell doesn't anyone have any scissors? You can never find things when you need them.

[She is ready to give up her search when she notices a small office off the main room.]

The director's office! [She darts over and starts rummaging through his desk for scissors. She is constantly alert for anyone coming in the room, afraid of being caught. She finds some and rushes back, looking behind her at the door.]

They're just children's scissors, safety scissors. I don't know why a grown man would have safety scissors in his office.... [she begins to snip at her sister's hair]

Let me just take off the split ends. Here – and the bangs. These scissors don't work for shit. Here – [arranging her sister's hair] I fixed the worst part of the bangs, and the ends – and here, why would they pull your hair so far off your face?

[Done, she realizes there are little bits of hair all over her sister's neck and chest and tries to brush them away.]

I don't know what you want me to do about this color. I cut off some of the most orange parts, but your roots look awful. The two shades don't even match.

[She pulls a scarf from around her neck and starts tying her sister's hair up into it.]

Hold on – that's okay. That's not bad, actually. It looks fashionable, actually, like Erykah Badu. [laughs] Let me just pull a few pieces down around your face...There. That actually looks good, I think.

[She stands back and admires her work, panting.]

Do you remember when you came to Brazil? I was there with the Peace Corps and you came out? I bought your ticket - not only paid for it, but I found it and I booked it myself and I told you, "All you have to do is come."

But of course, you couldn't leave Brian. And then there were drugs – you didn't like the idea of being without them, or in a place where you weren't sure to have them.

The night before your trip, you called me to say you weren't coming. You were having a panic attack, you couldn't get on the plane. You were crying and saying you were sorry. I

spent \$1400 on those tickets on a student credit card with a \$2000 limit. I begged you to come and then I got mad and said, "Fine, don't come!" But I still went to the airport to meet you, and of course you were there with your cheap luggage. Your hair was jet black and cut very short. It made you look pale.

We had a good time in Brazil. I wanted to show you what my life was like. I suppose I wanted to show off, too, to show you how tough I could be, away from home, and also how good a person I was, sleeping under a mosquito tent and helping all those poor women and children.

On your last day in Brazil, we hiked up to the top of a little mountain even though it was so hot and humid. I was used to it, but you, especially, were pouring sweat, you were so exhausted, and sweat and dirt were running down the sides of your face. It looked like you were sweating out the black hair dye. At the top of the mountain, someone had set up a zip line so tourists could skip the hike back down and glide instead down the whole way through the forest canopy.

You had another panic attack. I'm sure you remember that. You didn't cry, but you started to breath too fast and your face was pale. Your lips looked almost blue.

"Come on," I told you, "don't be such a coward."

"You came all this way! This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity."

"Look, it's okay, I'm sorry, we don't have to go if you don't want to."

You were sitting on a boulder. The ticket seller had long stopped paying attention to us, he was meticulously re-lacing his boots, one and then the other. The forest was exhaling a little like it does in the evening.

I said, "We have to go now or it'll be too late."

You got up and said okay. You were still scared but you weren't panicked.

The ticket seller strapped us into the harnesses, we lifted our legs off the platform, and he pushed us both gently out over the platform's edge.

We didn't go as fast as I thought we would. We sort of slid and floated. The tops of the trees below our feet looked very small. There were more trees above us. We slid down into the valley, disrupting the birds. At the far end, another guy unstrapped our harnesses, we stumbled off the platform, and we lay very still together on the grass. The sky was wheeling overhead, we were brave and safe. I knew then that our lives would go on forever, and that we would never die.

[She starts to close the lid, but can't. She leaves the coffin lid open and walks away.]