

The Way I See It

by Megan Gentry

When I first got it, it was perfect. All right angles, no rips and no scratches to its sleek, undimpled surface. It smelled crisp, too.

There's not any other smell like it in the whole world, really. Not exactly the crisp like apples on a fall day, or like those crunchy leaves you'll step on while picking them. No, this crispness is green—earthy—at once fresh and aged. You can smell it best at its heart.

Open it at the middle—hear that pop that tells declares that I'm the very first to open it? It was made just for me, reserved on the shelf for my hands alone. At least, that's what I like to think. Now that it's mine there's no one to tell me otherwise, so I'll allow my egocentricity some leeway. Why not?

When I take it home and knot myself into my favorite nest of pillows and blankets at the top corner of my bed, I turn its first page and greet eternal friends. Some of them I feel I've met before somewhere. Some of them I see in the mirror every day. Some of them I know will be there, alive, whether I'm turning pages or not. They have jobs, families, loves, and scandals to attend to, after all.

This world is at each turn wrapped in a sea of uniform void. The strangeness of a world already so filled, to have yet more empty space compels me to read with a pen in hand. Scribbles here. Brackets there. References to Dickens, Plath, or Lewis. Billy Collins knows what I am talking about—

Sometimes the notes are ferocious
skirmishes against the author
raging along the borders of every page
in tiny black script.

As I voyage uphill and down, I wonder that the volume must be terribly organic—human almost. It seems to be aging. With time come both wrinkles and affection. And dog-eared pages, small rips to a cover, dented corners, coffee stains.

Something's happening to me too.

A quarter of the way through I know these people. Their jobs, their loves, their heartaches.

Somewhere around page 300 we become one flesh, and their jobs are my jobs, their loves, my loves, and their heartaches, my heartaches.

The last chapter something else begins to loom. It's ominous, and the back of my mind grows dark and senses funeral dirges in the distance.

It's a gridlock. My mind reads faster to know what happens, but my hearts stops, refusing to take in any more. Refusing to take the last drink and thus empty the well.

But press on I will. Read on I must.

When I finally and selfishly claim that last word the dark bells toll. I knew they would. I'm not sure if I'm mourning, or if they are. Or if it's all the same.

Now it's time for the shelf again. Ashes to ashes, right? From whence it came, it will return. It's different this time. Still earthy, but not so green. Weathered. Beaten. Loved.

This time it takes its place, not next to many of its same title, but beside others that have been my journey already. A four-shelved case, stacked methodically with trophies. At least, that's the way I see books.