



PROSE | SUMMER 2021

Syncope

By F. Lee Mueller

Huh, I thought the floor had black tiles, not white. Oh, wait... that's the ceiling. Why is Ziyad's face so blurry, so large, and where are his neck and body? Why is he not smiling? What's wrong? Did something happen?

"Sweetie, sweetie, are you there? Can you hear me? Lee, is that her name? Yeah. Lee? How are you feeling? Lee? Hey Lee?"

A halo of blurry faces merges into just two. *That light is really bright.*

"You fainted." *I what?*

"We'll drive you to the hospital." *I feel fine, an ambulance would be an overreaction.*

"Do I have to go?"

"Let's just see you walk before you sign the AMA..."

"Okay."

I take a step and start to fall. **Pitch black.** I'm a foot lower than I should be. Time skipped a beat, or maybe space did.

"Did I just faint again?"

"I don't know, did you?" *Aren't you the paramedic? Shouldn't you know what fainting looks like.*

On the gurney ride, my consciousness fluctuates like the rattling of its metal bars. The white dorm room ceiling flips to the black behind my closed eyes. Glimpses of more white hallway ceilings become the blackness of the night sky, then switch to the white roof of the van. The deep, gentle blackness of the MRI machine is interrupted by the blinding white lights of the ICU.

EPIDURAL HEMATOMA AND A SKULL FRACTURE

"Are you in pain?" my teacher asks days later, repeating the same question I had brushed aside when it was posed by nurses and neurologists in the hospital. At the time, pain hadn't seemed as important as the possibility of avoiding a foley catheter placement.

I shake my head no, this time unable to speak. *Something is wrong though*, I want to say, but gravity is caving in on me, sealing my lips.

Bringggggg, bringggggg. A public-school veteran, I stand at the school bell's command. I turn. I open my mouth to ask a classmate to carry my apparently overweight, doctor-disapproved backpack, but my lacrimal ducts open themselves instead. Uninvited tears accompany my whispered words as the gravitational pull of the earth turns my legs into lead

amidst air that has turned to molasses. *Oh god, I'm going to need a wheelchair. I must actually be sick.*

"You fainted again." *Of course I did.*

The smooth tile is cool against my skin, but the thing that glues me to the floor is knowing that as soon as I sit up, I will have to face the whole congregation. I focus in on my dad's expressionless face and steal it for myself. Avert their gazes. Shuffle out of Church. Ashamed of my body in the place of its creator, but more ashamed to fulfill a stereotype. Luckily, we are in the back of the Nave, and I only have four crimson velvet pews and a few dozen dress hems worth of humiliation. *Did the almighty get a kick out of the irony of making the fledgling feminist chronically swoon?*

"Why don't you just sit here and rest," my dad advises.

"I know, I know," I say as I flippantly wave off his arm that is trying to guide me to a sitting position. I close my eyes, knowing there is nothing else to do but sit and wait. Cole rushes to fill a flimsy plastic cup with water from the fountain down the hallway from the chapel.

Cole looks terrified. His eyebrows straining for his hairline. His eyes as big as saucers. His hand clenches the now empty, clear cup a little too tightly, streaking it with white indentations. My father's calmness has become stern, more tense. His eyebrows want to furrow, but he fights to keep them in place. My sweat is cool and clammy, and my limbs feel heavy with sleep. I wouldn't dare try and move them from the scratchy, uncomfortable, puke-green fabric of the 70s style armchair.

"Why are you looking at me like that?"

"You just seized."

"Excuse me?"

"Your body was shaking."

My body is still as ice.

"How Morgan, I'm about to faint"

This is what they mean when they say searing pain. Searing? More like shearing. The tin can of creamed corn is so bloody, it is as if the cob is a shorn animal. Blood is thicker than water? Huh, well it's a lot less viscous than creamed corn. Even though my hand is losing volume, it is my head that feels lighter. This must be dizziness.

My Morgan, I'm about to faint.

I start to lower my body using the counter for support.
Bleep. Next scene.

Morgan's eyes have always dominated her face, but her sclera seem to leap out even more right now.

Hey look I'm sitting upright this time!

"Did I hit my head?"

"No, Emily caught it in time."

"Can you drive me to the ER, I think I might need some stitches."

Why am I still so nauseous? I thought I knew how to handle this by now.

"You better pull over, I'm about to vomit."

It is only **black** this time. No white. No faces.

I finger the loops of the soft carpet beneath me trying to locate myself in the world. My bedroom. My bedroom floor. I was walking to the bathroom in the middle of the night.

YOU ARE NOT DREAMING. LEE, YOU ARE NOT DREAMING. YOU HAVE TO REMEMBER THIS IN THE MORNING. THIS IS REAL, YOU FAINTED AGAIN.

If a tree falls in the middle of the woods and no one is there to hear it, does it make a sound?

If a Lee falls in the middle of the night and no one is there to witness it, did she really faint?

What is fainting without the faces? What is the blackness without the white?

Is a head injury risky if nobody is there to worry about one?

Should I just go back bed?

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