



Volume 23
Issue 2015 *Cats in Zanzibar* (2014-2015 Issue)

Article 10

2015

Bug

Raeann Bauer

Follow this and additional works at: <http://commons.cu-portland.edu/promethean>



Part of the [Creative Writing Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Bauer, Raeann (2015) "Bug," *The Promethean*: Vol. 23 : Iss. 2015 , Article 10.
Available at: <http://commons.cu-portland.edu/promethean/vol23/iss2015/10>

This Story is brought to you for free and open access by CU Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Promethean by an authorized administrator of CU Commons. For more information, please contact libraryadmin@cu-portland.edu.



Bug

Raeann Bauer

When I was little, my name was Bug. At least, that is what my mom told me. Like other children, my parents gave me nicknames. Childhood nicknames seem to make most teens cringe but, at the age of nineteen, I cried.

My family is the crayon drawing on a fridge. It is a mommy and daddy with two kids, an older sister and a younger brother. They are all smiling. They are holding hands. They are happy.

“Raeann Elan, stop it,” my mother whispers through her teeth at me.

There are too many memories to single out which time my mom said this to me. It was probably that time I bit my baby brother’s toe when I was three at the state fair. At one and a half years, toes wiggle far too much not to be bitten, especially when they are hogging all of the attention. Or, it might have been that time when I started crying at Disney World because all of the other girls had a Mickey Mouse ice cream with the round, delicate ears and grape bubblegum eyes.

It was probably the time we were out to eat and the right side of my dad’s upper lip not so quietly sneered, “They probably stole the menus too. Gyps.” And I cried for the uncomfortable ignorance of the laugh that escaped my mom’s frown and my dad’s fake laugh that made a racist remark “just a saying, Raeann” or “just a joke, Raeann.”

Growing up, it was the cardinal sin to let others see anything but our shiny lacquered surfaces, bright with the polish of secret tears and vibrant like a newly printed photo, not given the chance to see the light. It was all to keep what was on the outside separate from the stuff on the inside. You can’t draw sadness with crayons.

I am the oldest by almost two years and my brother is the youngest. Cameron was always “Cam Cam” or “Scoot Scoot” named so for the red-rider colored, old-fashioned scooter he used to ride all the time. It was my dad’s when he was little and Cam would wheel it around our wooden deck, chasing his latest scraped knee. When my dad would walk past him, he would abandon the scooter and run after. He would pull on his green pants leg begging to go with him.

And so they rode off on weekends to have guy time. Somehow, I was always a little too slow to catch up. Even the time that I climbed into the hot car before they left and buckled myself in, I sat breathing in the smell of heat and the warm leather of the dashboard just waiting. Even the time it was my birthday and I insisted that it be my pass into guy time. But I would have never liked guy time. It wouldn't have been fun for me. It wasn't for me. At least, those were the excuses. There was one time that I was allowed to go with them.

The gates to guy time were rusted and metal. This was my father's passion and church. He was here every weekend without fail and it showed. We drove up to the booth and purchased a ticket to go into the flea market. It was a junkyard of treasure. We parked in the field in front of the buildings and tents. We worked our way around to all of the booths.

I knew by now not to ask for silly things that a ten-year-old girl might want, so I did not look too closely. We went from vender to vender; there were tools and collectables. There were cassette tapes and CDs, jewelry, and other small, dusty things. The people all knew my dad. They knew my brother too. Many of them had candy or toys for him. They greeted them with a smile and a present, but I was the unknown. "Who is this?" and "I didn't know you had a daughter." I felt like I was an outsider and I was. They all knew about Cameron's soccer game, but they didn't even know I existed. I was Raeann. I was the oldest. I was Bug.

The first time I found out I was a girl called Bug, I was nineteen. I had gone home on a weekend during college to pick up some things I had forgotten. It was the first time I had seen any of my family in three months. I drove up and parked near the side of the house. As I was walking into the garage, my dad walked out of the house. He strode past me, talking on his work cell phone, clad in his trademark green Carhartt jeans. I didn't try to run after him or even try to get his attention. I let him go. My mom greeted me and helped me collect some of my things. We talked about how school was going. We talked about how I liked my classes. We talked about how my mom was filing for divorce.

My family's happiness is like a puzzle. If I assigned a face on a

pain chart to our family unit, it would be the "Hurts Even More" face. It is the wobbly one with the number six out of ten. In the moments of my childhood, I would say that we were content. Upon reflection, I realize that it was because those moments were filled with distractions. My mother tried everything to give the impression to my brother and me that we were happy. Every school break was filled with camping trips to the beach with just my mom, brother and me and the anticipation for the next whole family trip. Stripped away, those breaks were moments when we created our own new happiness. We created our own small puzzle piece that was made of laughs, but the picture the puzzle created did not make a happy scene. The fear of our flight caused the beginning of my father's gifts.

When I was little, my dad was Santa Claus. He became Santa out of guilt and tradition. He began leaving gifts for me to find when we got home after trips. When I was a child, they were just presents. Through an adult's perspective, they were apologies. The Tweety Bird stuffed animal, I am sorry for not making it to any of your soccer games. The cassettes of murder mysteries, I missed you when you were at the beach. The air conditioning unit for my dorm, I wish we were closer. Each gift was expected and yet never actually given. I was always expected to thank him. I would always find the gifts on the top of my bed. There was never a note or an explanation. There was just a new possession on a cold blanket. It was just something to fill the father shaped crack in my memories. They were a trade on the dirty flea market mistress that my father had enslaved himself to.

My father is a "collector." He has rooms of things that he really doesn't need. He has stacks and stacks of toilet paper. He has boxes of Disney collectables and records he never listens to. He devotes his life to these things and they welcome him. They make him feel in control. There is no excuse give for why he feels the need to collect things. Just like money, the more he has, the better he can fill his own father shaped crack. It isn't the quality of the goods or the things that he can buy with his money. It is the amount of things that he can have.

My grandfather is the same way. He "collects" things. When I was little, I would go over to my grandparent's house. They had a ranch

style house with a basement. My father and my uncle grew up down there and when they moved out, the stuff moved in. I never saw the basement or what was in it.

When I was about to go into middle school, they moved. Now, they have a two story house on a farm. It is a farm with sheds full of things and the second story is filled with boxes. There is no going up there. My dad and my grandfather are a lot alike. The difference is that my grandfather uses sharp words and harsh judgments that cut deep. For my dad, the only way to staunch the bleeding is to press his things to him. If he has things, he will never truly be alone. They will always have the security that they will not be abandoned or forgotten. Like a dragon atop his hoard, he covets the next sparkly thing to catch his eye, and it is enough for him to just sit above all that he owns and feel at peace.

The first time I found out I was a girl called Bug I was nineteen. My mom asked me if I thought it was a good idea for her to leave my dad. *If I thought it was a good idea to leave my dad.*

Even though I have seen the hurt that he has caused my brother and my mom and even now, myself, he is still Santa and I am still waiting for my next cold present. But how can I explain this to a person who feels so insecure about leaving a man that criticizes her and has long since left the emotional part of the marriage? So I said, I guess. I guess that you have tried hard enough to make it work. I guess that crayon lifestyle has long since faded away. I guess that you will be happier by yourself because he left us a long time ago.

Relieved, she hugs me and voices her concern that I might have been upset about the split.

“You know, when you were born you were so small that they almost had to keep you in the hospital and wouldn’t send you home with us. Your dad used to hold your head in his palm and lay your body on his forearm. He called you his ‘little bug’.”

As I drove away back to the much safer dorm, I had to fight the tears. Like bile or a laugh that you try to stifle, it fought with my esophagus. *Raeann Elan, stop it.* So, I did. I pushed down all of the hurt and all of the pain. I pushed the idea of abandonment and the feeling of being wronged down.

After all, I am Bug.