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# Unseen

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## UNSEEN | JAMI HODGINS

Spring came, and I watched my grandmother wither. I was in the room when she died, but I didn't even notice when she grew still. She didn't look dead at first. Not until the nurse came in to detach her from the weary ventilator that breathed for her. In that moment, I wanted to rewind the years and relive all the evenings when I would sit on the kitchen counter, barefoot, gap-toothed, and lick the tea-cake cookie dough from the bowl while she sang melodic praises to her Almighty God. I thought the balls of dough she spaced out on the pan looked like planets, worlds I wanted to discover.

When I was eight, I woke up in the middle of the night, hearing the monsters clawing underneath my bed. The moonlit window called my name, and I answered. I saw the old man next door yank a young blonde from his doorstep by her wrist, and I saw her left earring—a gaudy, lonesome sapphire teardrop—fall into the grass, lost in the night, before she disappeared through his dimly-lit threshold. I remember thinking, shouldn't they be in bed? And when I saw the light flick on in his bedroom window, I learned that beds were used for more than sleeping and shadows told all the stories we never wanted to hear.

A few weeks later, I watched a woman roll down the window of her grey Prius and ask for directions to the nearest gas station. I heard the fifteen-year-old boy, street-smart, empty-pocketed, tell her the wrong way to go. I didn't see the boy or the woman again.

Years passed.

On my way back from an interview for a part-time job I wasn't sure I wanted at a commercial novelty store in a run-down strip mall, I saw a little girl, pig-tailed, purple-jacketed, console her weeping mother two seats up from me on the bus.

"It's okay, Mommy," she said.

"No, it is not okay," her mother whispered back.

I saw her reflection in the window as she looked out at all the people unknowingly passing her by. I read in her eyes that she had seen wars, while most kids her age had seen the smooth, white-painted sides of fences and the shadows cast over them by trichromatic flags pointing toward heaven.

First semester of my sophomore year of college, I watched the girl in the corner of the classroom grimace at the guy groping for her attention, crooning "baby" into the ear she had intentionally

curtained with her long, brown hair. I watched her cringe when he leaned closer. He pulled away, laughing, and shifted his weight to hide the bulge in his pants as the professor walked in.

After that, I saw sleepless nights. I sat through my classes, nodding my head to keep from nodding off. When one of my professors came in and told us to describe our experiences with cognitive dissonance, I quietly contemplated. I tried to figure out whether or not I partook in the phenomenon. My mind had learned to keep secrets from itself when I was young. I saw everything and nothing—beautiful, horrendous. My most heavily veiled secret is this: I saw the world eat itself. My stomach churned as I sat on the kitchen counter, and I watched. This time, I did not lick the bowl.