

# Leah's eyes

Your eyes  
caught my eye  
the first time we met.

Unique but not beguiling; simply garnering notice.  
Your eyes, so distinctive and so  
consistent with the multi-faceted you: your  
big-heartedness: such a virtue, yet  
simultaneously such a vulnerability.

For your unborn child you fixed your eyes on the  
prize of staying clean and healthy—to remain  
whole, and I watched your precious son gaze  
up at you so sweetly in the delivery room.  
But the State gave no consideration to your  
eyes the day they took your kids away.

That you were back in town, I'd heard;  
that you had gone missing never made it  
to my inbox. Those extraordinary,  
unforgettable eyes! Yet the coroner had to  
resort to dental records to identify your body.

Did the flood play a role? Did it cloud  
the picture, blur the evidence, muddle the  
scene, rendering your autopsy little more than  
an exercise in futility, an empty anthropologic  
expedition? Or did it simply hasten the dust-to-dust  
return of those non-conforming eyes to the  
elements of organic degradation, to the banks  
of the Big Sioux where their pain could  
no longer abide?

I'm haunted when I think of your eyes—what  
did they divulge in those final moments? Defiance?  
Fear? The glaze of addiction? Hopelessness?  
Incredulity? Peace?

You never shared your torment with us,  
yet it didn't escape our notice. We truly  
cared for you, my nurses and I. And I know  
you understood that—  
I could see it in  
your eyes.

—Charles W. Shafer, MD

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