

Rule Out Euthymia

by Ann Bogle

My sister is stuck in a physical passion. She describes it as an aura that lasts longer than the time it takes to watch a film, but after a real film, the credits roll, the illusion breaks, and the color of life seeps back in, one reminder at a time, until one is who one is again, even when the film is about sick passion.

The man Juni calls Bing hurts her feelings compulsively then screws her so completely that her wish to talk about it is drummed from her forever—forever, that is, until the next time. We come to her rescue (by now it is less often than she would like), but we cannot rescue her; no one can. She turns on us, on him, on everyone. I have seen her snap at a bank teller, and my sister is hardly ever rude. That, too, must be part of the high or demon or whatever it is that costs the pretty penny. "How would you know?" she says. "You're not a guy."

As a sinner who has bowed devoutly to four years of psychotherapy myself, I see what she is up to, and I care, to a point. To care any more than I do would keep it my problem.

Bing is just a trucker. That is what I tell our mother. I say, "Mom, all it is is, Juni has a thing for men with guts," but our mother did not raise her daughters to have "things" for anything, let alone for men "with guts." She raised them to help those who need help, not to ask for help, and to live in married certitude with men without guts.

Men like her dead husband, our dead lawyer father, who folded over his desk at ten of one evening. What husband? I used to say in the days before his death, before my own therapy, where I was reminded that every situation in life is of my own making. He left behind a wife, six daughters—all of us named after trees or

shrubs—and an ungodly insurance policy. No one carries that much insurance.

Bing's father died standing up doing shift work. I should say, he fell over. Bing was twenty-one. I tell our mother that that is not why.

Juni's counselor, salesperson for higher powers who serve addictive personalities here on earth, has told us that only twelve steps and fifteen thousand dollars can save Juni: Juni is a co-sex addict.

When Juni is not threatening extreme unction to hotline volunteers (she calls hotlines in other cities when the hotline number in her city is busy), she tells us that Bing is the smartest man she has ever known—witness his survival as a teenager at a juvenile detention center and his finesse on the Interstate Highway System. Leave it to me to imagine what they do on it when Juni is with him and not barely at her job for the state.

Our youngest sister, Jade, wants to know what the deal is; although she wouldn't say it to me, she wants to be, as her sister is, in love. Jade is seventeen. As far as I know Jade is still a virgin, although I think that Mr. Biebel molested her when she was nine. She can't remember, but she hates her stomach and thighs. I believe that Mr. Biebel had a crack at all of us, except for maybe Holly, the third born. None of us really remembers what happened, but we all have improper relations with food. Holly has never had one disordered thought about food in all her life, and she never fell in love so badly that she failed to graduate from college, or, like me, to leave it. As a nutritionist, I hope to ban Biebels from the refrigerator, at least from refrigerators in Milwaukee, but it leaves me feeling marooned after French philosophy, where I first learned to play a field.

In her belief that Juni is lucky, Jade eases the horrors our mother suffers at night, not because Juni is stuck in a physical passion, but because the whole family and whole groups of strangers know what Juni is doing for sex. Juni does not have sex, I tell Jade. Juni is sex.

Lately, Juni is thin. Her breasts are small. She may not obviously resemble a man, but it saves everyone the trouble of self-differentiation. It bothers me that no one in her support group has even mentioned it. They mention humiliating moments, but apparently not the humiliating belief that one does not have the right to eat. Bing certainly does not suffer that humiliation. He eats *her*, like a hamburger or a donut. "I'm not *thin*, Laurel," she says. "I'm not even normal size. Look at these!" she cries, clutching at the flimsy sides of her hips and legs.

She needs exercise, but if I say it, she will feel condemned. She will worry that she doesn't fuck right. It will be like a man upping the ante all over again from the cover of a women's magazine.

Sometimes I think that if Juni knew women in more wholesome circumstances than in their own decrepitude that she would be all right. All she has in the way of women are support groups and her family. And what is family, really?

She has the prayer that Jesus brought her, but, as she told her group, she does not pray while Bing is fucking her. She prays later, to his sleeping corpse, when it's over, and she's done, first to us, then to him, then alone.

Our mother, Geraldine—as she likes to remind us—is hip. She goes catalog shopping, not because she couldn't spend whole days in ceremony in department stores if she wanted to nor because she

wouldn't do that if her lifestyle depended on it, but because cranberry-ale cardigans and pewter-puff pullovers communicate her optimism. She hopes that by her example her daughters will stop wearing only black. Her friends call her Geri, a name with a tweeter to it, a flip, as if Geri were someone who couldn't help but be her own person (men's names on women always serve that way), but our mother is Mom first and Mrs. Reeve Baumgaard second, even though Mr. Baumgaard has been dead for almost twelve years.

Since Juni met Bing, she wears torn blue jeans and men's white v-necks, and because she is as thin as a boy, people say she looks great in them. She wears what she finds on Bing's floor, where he lives with his father's half-brother, or she gives up afternoons tugging through racks at the Salvation Army.

Jade and I like the real thing: We go real shopping with Mom's credit card. Jade is in high school and doesn't have a job, and my stipend as a research assistant barely covers my efficiency apartment and the food I buy, which is expensive—raw nuts and seeds, yogurt farmed in small batches, organic apricot juice. Jade and I both wear size 12, which I sense has been a deep disappointment to Mr. Biebel—all the more reason to buy the most flattering, extravagant clothing we can find. Sometimes we shop sales; other times we just grab the car keys and head for Rome. We buy the new fall line before it hits the racks. We buy make-up, too, especially lipstick, my favorite way to kiss off a Biebel, but I admit, it's a little compulsive.

The middle three—Holly, Heather, and Lil (her real name is Lilac)—are all married and living elsewhere—Holly in Denver, Heather in Coon Rapids, and Lil in Waco. We mainly see them at Christmas, when we all tend to wear what our mother has bought us.

Bing is 34, and like a lot of men just over thirty, he bloats on

beer. If Juni were not a co-sex addict, she would be a co-alcoholic. His work gives him a good ass and good legs—all that climbing in and climbing out, loading and unloading. I can see the attraction on that level, and that is the level we are talking about. Since as a family we are opposed to Bing, it would be hypocritical to ask Juni what sort of torso he has. Bing is too polite or too self-conscious to take off his shirt in our presence, so we don't know how strong or hairy he is there. We are just left wondering.

1995

