Look At Me
By Oliva Amato

I’m sitting in the back seat of the Yukon, wedged between piles of suitcases that have been leaning precariously over my head for the past four hours. This fact only makes me disgruntled when I’m forced to shove the heap away in order to save myself, but as the only family member that can somewhat-comfortably fit back here, I know this is my responsibility. I’m zoning out, listening to Taylor Swift with my headphones that have peace signs on them when her voice abruptly cuts out.

We’re getting close!

Excitement imbues me as I tear off my headphones and throw myself to the window. Familiar blurs of trees rush past as they obscure the woods’ dark depths. I convince myself that I glimpse dark figures within it as we blow by. Smiling inwardly, I think anything feels possible here.

Consciously giving into the stereotype I hate, I ask my dad how close we are to our destination. He takes his time replying, although he knows I’m on the edge of my seat, but eventually tells me about a half hour left. My face falls a bit, but as I continue to stare with anticipation at the perpetual scenery around us, knowing that by now my phone is sure to be out of reach from any service and no longer a source of entertainment, I discover I am perfectly content to watch in adulation as the deific picture in front of me comes alive.
Perceptively, I feel the energy in the car shift from individual solitude to complete synchronicity as we register we all share the same exhilaration venturing into the world we inexplicably love more than any other.

We pull up into the gravel driveway and see both humans and animals coming to greet us. I don’t make it five feet from the car before I’m enveloped in hugs. I feel the grin grow and plant itself on my face, refusing to be torn off for the next two days. I can see the rest of the story play out in my head.

My siblings and friends and I will spend a couple seconds inside the warm, welcoming cabin before we embark on an adventure around the mile-long loop of neighboring cabins, each with their own animated characters who know us by name, affection-seeking animals, and hundreds of stories to tell. We’ll travel by the infamous haunted house on Shady Lane that we might return to later that night with enough courage.

We’ll catch up with friends who we only see this one weekend of the year, and yet we know these people better than anyone else in our lives because we talk and look at each other; the look that means we don’t just see each other, but we see the cracks in our armor and the parts where the light shines through. We get to watch year by year as the individuals grow into the beautiful souls they’ve been given.

We’ll recount memories around a campfire while we gaze at the clear astral sky that I’m convinced is hand-painted by God. When we finally tire ourselves out from Flashlight Tag, we’ll fall asleep watching Scooby Doo in our sleeping bags in the room that is ridiculously small for five growing kids. We won’t mind the closeness though as we laugh and play-fight until we collapse onto the uncomfortable floor.
We’ll wake up slowly to birds singing and the sun coming through the blinds, but then much quicker by my uncle who makes coffee at six am in the adjoining kitchen. I’ll get up soon after and take this opportunity to go down to the river when no one is around and just listen. In these moments, I feel I am spending the morning with God.

When Sunday comes, we will play music and dance on the deck, while the adults will spend the whole day slaving away in the kitchen for a feast that everyone is welcome at. Together, we will celebrate love with a community of people that we rarely see but intimately know. These will be the best memories of my childhood. And these memories will last only in my own head.

Over the course of the weekend, I may think about my phone a total of two times. I know I could stay in that place, that happiness, my whole life.

As we drive back into town, into unfortunate reality, into the world where service is abundant and the internet is at my fingertips, I’m actually going further and further from home. The vibration of my phone going off every three minutes deepens my malaise.

We could be real all the time. If people understood the relationships we can have if we put down our technology and focus only on God’s creations, maybe people would be able to look at each other instead of looking through one another to the next thing and the next thing, always in some never-ending cycle of wanting more and not appreciating what we have. As the book *Paper Towns* puts it:

> When did we see each other face-to-face? Not until you saw into my cracks and I saw into yours. Before that, we were just looking at ideas of each other, like looking at your
window shade but never seeing inside. But once the vessel cracks, the light can get in.

The light can get out. (Green)

We can only see each other after we break down the walls that hold us together. This feat alone is complicated, but with the inescapable technology that surrounds my generation, it is unfeasible.

Maybe, without technology, people would see me as a child of God rather than a follower on their Instagram or a statistic whose only use is to benefit them. Maybe we could look at each other and begin to see the light overflowing in all of us, begging to break out of the shields we build around ourselves, especially the one that fits in our pocket.