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Diagnosis
by Courtney Druzak

1688:
Swiss doctors start diagnosing a disease called Nostalgia.

Note:
Swiss soldiers fighting in France miss their native food, mountains, and women.
Symptoms:
melancholy, anxiety, lack of appetite, and stupidity of the mind.

Yeah, I’m sad.
But I don’t like to get out the old photo album or scrapbook with a box of Kleenex nearby.
Instead, I pull out my Nintendo Gameboy and put together the perfect Pokemon team.
Halfway through the game,
I always start over.
Or sometimes, it gets so bad I watch reruns.
Usually Boy Meets World or Sailor Moon.
Recently, Law and Order SVU.
I can recite the entire opening.

And I’ve got these nervous habits, see.
I turn around to check if the door is locked and press my body against the hard
wood until it *clicks* soudly.
Twist the blinds shut
until they won't close any tighter
    and no glass window is visible.
Trim my nails down to the quick
or else I bite and scratch
up my gums, making them bleed.
    And I can't use libraries.
        Those books have been used like whores.
Anyone could have had their hands on them.
Don't get me started on loud noises.
Airplanes,
    delivery trucks,
        snow plows,
            someone yelling
make my blood
pressure go up and my hands start to shake.

I'm not so sure about this next one.
I've got a healthy appetite.
    At least I think I do.
Sugar is too good for me to resist:
    cherry pie
        donuts
            chocolate.
Pretty much anything
I can get my hands on.
And I'm always ready to be anywhere
    that's handing out free food.
The only meal I miss is breakfast.
But I think I make up for it later,
so this one really doesn't apply,
does it?

As for stupidity of the mind…
   Yeah, I guess you could say I have that too.
   I space out a lot.

Bump into people.
   Sometimes walls.
The sleeves of my shirts will even get caught on doorknobs when I’m not paying attention.

Just recently
I was thinking about how much I hate Claudio from *Much Ado About Nothing,*
   the little sexist,
   patriarchal bastard,
and while I was thinking about how much more I prefer Benedick because he can’t write poetry,
   I fell up the stairs.

I think in that moment I felt a connection with him.
   I can’t write poetry either.
It makes me wonder
   if Benedick falls up the stairs
or has bouts of nostalgia where the only way to cure it is to watch Elliot and Olivia convince a rapist to confess on Netflix.
Criminal
     by Claire Swauger

Tampered evidence
Leads to conviction of false faith
And the persecution of angelic criminals
Seemingly less clean fingers poke
The chest of a fair felon
So he sits in self-loathing.
Come to my lap
Pure prisoner
I will grab your chin
And look with objective eyes.
I see your false framing
Under the guise of “good people.”
You don’t have to whisper
Any longer.
**Coupled**  
by Alison Taverna

In the debate between couplets or quatrains you say couplets are sex in the brain.

Something about tension, the tug of sentences soft, eager to twist. Summer in the Loft

“casual,” poets doubt, dread, love. Pesto, baths in the kitchen, oversized flannel. Above

The Lumineers sing *Slow It Down*. Vines drip a midnight monsoon. Fourth of July

legs swing off the ledge, count the reluctance for lightning to follow thunder. Distance.

You wear more years, but I’m more. My hands, sure.
this is what it looks like when she says 'i love you' in 2003
by Elizabeth Lewis

i like
heads.
i like how they work,
their ins and outs,
their ups and downs.

i like learning about
brains and synapses and impulses and how
a burst of energy can make me
feel the way i do, sometimes.

i find it all very interesting.

our short term memory is only capable of holding seven units
of information at a time.
it's a fact, think of phone numbers.
here, look at this number,
close your eyes,
wait twelve seconds and then say the number out loud.
5291920

okay? now do the same with this one.
547529192073136

see, i like
heads
and what fills them.
i like skulls and neurons and
how you aren't conscious of your pinky toe right this second
but now you are.

the first time we kissed we were walking
and i was looking down but she was looking at me.
the second time we kissed was on broadway and 51st,
she pushed me up against a building.
the third, fourth, fifth, sixth and seventh all happened in short
sequence
somewhere near the elevator.
they all traveled my nervous system,
lit up like a city grid from an airplane with the
pulsing flashes of an eyelash or a freckle,
past the temporal lobe,
and nestled right into the hippocampus,
sending the files to be stored in different areas,

assuring that even through massive head trauma,
some part of me would still remember her face,
and that there is not an inch of me she has left untouched.

it gives a new meaning to
"you're on my mind."

each day i learn a new seven things about her,
but i don't forget.
Sweet Remembrance
by Melissa Garrett

With frost and solemn hearts
Shall my precious Summer flee—
Wilting golden petals, once lush
In the bitter eve.

To behold you once more
Would spoil blue snow,
And I’d fill with remorse
As the rivers would flow.

To flood ever long grassroots,
And sink the elder trees.
To do away with the flowers
Still so ripe with seeds.

There come bittersweet moments
When a friend must go—
Departed from the Earth
By a dimmer sun glow.

Love will weather the storm,
And bitterness shall fade.
One to be snowstorms,
The other, summer shade.

Like changing times inevitable
Shall I let you depart,
Though I clench at the burden
Of my weakening heart.
[hair in winter]
by Payal Patel

I wrap my hair for the windy morning
watching other women, heads of printed paisley and warm wool, bob
in the crowd. Just as they bob—
I do and I know in the sea behind me they bob still too.

In this wind, turning my head would perhaps loosen my scarf. Cause it to tumble
free down the slope of my shoulders like rough fringes, waves of grass.

As printed paisley and warm wool turn into the warmth of a building
I do.

Though I don't stop as they do, releasing their glory in blacks and browns
blondes and red. I don't stop to see the printed paisley fold up, warm wool tucked away.
Modest winter is still on my back so smooth. For now it
laughs away the hasty roots of bright raw grass.
Travis

by Kimberly Webb

If I divorce myself from reality,
Can I stay in your bed tonight?
Never meant to crawl in and get warm
But it happened
And now it happens,
Sometimes.
I feel alive
Hiding in bands and music and notes
And the look of your face when you frown
You said I haven’t seen you smile in awhile
You know, I haven’t seen his smile in awhile
Maybe it’s just the space that takes us awhile
That makes us wait.
And maybe it’s just open ended hugs, and kisses
To the mouths of those falling apart and falling
Asleep.
parenthesis

by Elizabeth Lewis

(i
often forget the end parenthesis, it's a quirk.
i start the sentence, the after thought, the small clarification and
then just
go on writing.

see, the problem is
that soon the
whole rest of the paragraph gets grouped in,
committed.
tied down.
held tightly.
and then
pretty soon your
whole goddamn paper is just part of this
half-finished,
never-ending
parentheses,
and it just gets longer and more complicated the longer
i write.
and it grows and grows more twisted with the roots, deeper;

i think i forgot our end parenthesis.

and i could type it now, sure.
i could close it all off and move onto
a new thought, collect our losses
and part but
fuck.
there’s so much in this story so far.

there’s so much of our story so far.
Amplification
by Robin Schweitzer

I thought I heard the doorknob turn
the lock clicked open
I could have sworn

But it was only the sound of my eyelashes
Beating against the bed linens
Butterfly sounds become
Deafening
Fracking
by Courtney Druzak

How is it the throat knows to be thirsty?
To dry out,
a worm on a sidewalk,
or send a sharp release of air to slap against teeth?
A narrow, fleshy pipe bored from mouth to stomach—
we are what we eat,
or so it’s said.
Swallow—
the muscles contract
to a deep drilling down.
Shoot liquid life
down the drain
to a bath of hydrochloric acid, a chemical mixer—
H2O, meet HCI—
until the body cracks,
one great cavern waiting to fill glasses full of cocktail poison.
Under Water
by Ashleigh Fox

I think I should like to be a mermaid.
My wavy hair
    below my breasts
        flowing with the current.
Hides their imperfections
    from the surface
    from the harsh rays

of sun filtered
through surface

and depth
    where I
understand the moon’s power of the tide.

And what’s expected of me is
Live
    among the mosaic corals
        that burn others with a scratch
    among glistening fish existing
to swim.
My voice so alluring
it sings sailors to death.
My kiss so desired it grants
breath to the lungless.

Yes, I should like to be a mermaid.
But all I can do is
sink
to the bottom
of this cracked white tub
and pretend.
The Execution of Ryan Braun: An Excerpt
by Meaghan Clohessy

I found out about The Braun Situation the same way other young adults get their news nowadays: Facebook. It’s not much different from reading a newspaper, I suppose. Statuses are just like news stories, only more conceited and without proper grammar. They also have an unnecessary amount of the phrase ‘lol.’

The status came from Becky Coftka, a classmate from high school. Once, her profile picture was that of her straddling a cardboard cutout of Ryan Braun, left fielder for the Milwaukee Brewers. Her leg curled lasciviously around the figure, eyes locked in his glossy eyes. Her hot pink fingernails gripped his chest, begging the cutout to spring to life and whisk her out of Miller Park with his Greek God outfielder arms.

I couldn’t help but to wonder if she actually knew of Braun’s on-base percentage, his plate discipline, and his batting average. Did she know that he was putting up MVP numbers this year, like I did? Did she realize how many eligible Wisconsin women clamored their greedy hands on that same cutout, painting outline with saliva and Miller Lite flavored vomit? Not that anyone could blame them. After all, he was the face of the Milwaukee Brewers. A good-looking one at that.

Now, her profile picture long changed, a single status was written. Usually when she wrote about Braun, one could read the hormones taking off like the fireworks over Bernie Brewer’s Splash Zone whenever a Brewer hit a home run. In this status, Becky’s hormones descended from her loins and fell to ground below.

*Ryan Braunnn. i cant even, lol.*

Cast with dull intrigue, I scanned comments for
clarification. No dice. All sex jokes, no substance. Typical. In other news, the sun would be out tomorrow.

Next step: Google. I type in the name of the Brewer outfielder. Trepidation hollowed out my bones like it did right before I was stricken with insomnia. At that point, one of two things had happened: one, he was out for the next season due to a freak injury. Two, he was getting married. As I pressed enter, I said a quick prayer to God, promising him I would stop cursing if Ryan Braun remained single. Sometimes I’m just not subtle.

The screen changed, opening images of Ryan Braun posing in a swing. The way his veins protruded from his sculpted biceps reminded me of comic books where the superhero slowly reveals himself, panel by panel. I did my best not to linger. Then:

Braun Reportedly Tests Positive for PEDs
Peds? Wasn’t that a shoe made in the 70s? I clamped my fingers on the bridge of my nose, frustrated at my own shortcomings at baseball lingo. There was a link from the ESPN website, so I clicked on it. I began to read the article. This time, the headline was clear:

Ryan Braun Tests Positive for Steroids
While reading, I didn’t notice the movements of my heart and its struggle to climb its way up like a vulture towards my throat.

***

Quick! When was the last time the Pittsburgh Pirates won the World Series? Don’t know? Okay, who is the manager of the Texas Rangers? How about the first draft pick by the Milwaukee Brewers in 2002?

Fine. Who are Sammy Sosa, Barry Bonds, and Alex Rodriguez?
If anything, everyone knows these names. These players were the All-Stars and MVPs of the 1990s and 2000s, accolades tarnished by PED abuse, or performance enhancement drugs. It’s all the same story: beloved baseball player tests positive for steroids and an entire fan base backs their innocence. Time passes, and players admit their guilt. The confusion of Major League Baseball could not match the rage of betrayed fan bases. Fans were disillusioned. No longer were baseball players the people you fantasized about having a beer with. They signed autographs with one hand and hid dirty needles with the other. No player could be trusted. MLB was desperate, scrambling to salvage the shattered fragments of an innocent sport. Since these cases, MLB has installed a new drug policy, complete with tests and punishment. The list of banned substances under this drug policy is long, but self-explanatory. No illegal drugs such as marijuana, crack or cocaine. No amphetamines, no weight loss supplements. Prescription drugs could be taken with written consent from the team’s medical department.

No steroids. Those are always unacceptable. Always.

Ryan Braun never failed a drug test. Since 2007, he was baseball’s Carrie Nation, upholding the regulations behind MLB’s drug testing policy. When the news of A-Rod’s failed drug test broke out, it was Braun who first expressed annoyance at the Yankee.

“The best thing he can do,” Braun said, “is admit to everything and be completely honest. The situation will die a lot faster if he tells the whole truth.”

Meanwhile, Braun was perfecting a swing comparable to the sword Alexander the Great used to conquer the Middle East. By 2011, he led a team that had not seen the World Series in thirty years to two postseasons. In both of the critical games,
he delivered a home run that would prove decisive. That homerrun in 2011 was more memorable. From the moment he swung the bat against Florida Marlins pitcher Clay Hensley, 45,000 people, including Braun himself, knew that ball was never going to hit the ground. He raised his bat in the air like a scepter before slamming it on the ground and running the bases. The ball finally landed in the bleachers, drowned in the harmonic cries of Miller Park. The lasting image from that game would be Braun during the post game interviews, with the National Central title firmly under the belt of the Brewers, sobbing, eyes stinging with tears and the flow of champagne.

Braun was General Manager Doug Melvin’s answer for the face of the Brewers franchise. He gave the Brewers a needed hometown discount, signing with the team until 2020. He was an All-Star three years in the row, though he had sat out the last game due to a calf injury. He could have played, but Braun insisted that, if he could not play for his team, he did not deserve to play in the All-Star Game.

It was impossible not to love Ryan Braun.

It certainly helped that he ignited the thighs of Wisconsin women everywhere. To watch Braun bend over provided more entertainment than the Klement’s Sausage Races. For this army of bachelorettes and bored housewives, he was almost as adorable as Aaron Rodgers of the Green Bay Packers. Almost.

Hey, whatever man did not have crème puff smashed in his face was a hunk by Wisconsin standards.

In October of 2011, Braun provided his yearly urine sample to prepare for the Brewer second stint in the postseason. It would be a month before the results would be revealed. Much had happened in that month: the St. Louis Cardinals, in a turn of historical irony, had knocked them out of the postseason and went on to win the World Series. Fans mourned what would be
the inevitable departure of Milwaukee baseman Prince Fielder. This sorrow was allayed by the announcement that Ryan Braun had won the National League MVP, narrowly beating out Matt Kemp, the LA Dodgers outfielder, for the title. Wisconsin rejoiced in their shining star. Necessary celebrations were had and from there, it was supposed to be routine. Doug Melvin was going out to the Winter Meetings to replace offense and fans counted down the days until spring training.

Behind closed doors, something had gone wrong. Ryan Braun, the poster child of the Milwaukee Brewers, had failed his drug test. According to MLB drug policy, Braun was due for a fifty game suspension with no pay. The news was shrouded in secrecy; not even Doug Melvin or Ron Roenicke, Brewers manager, knew the fate of the results. All Braun could hope for was a swift appeal, explain the truth, and report to spring training. No one would ever have to know.

And yet, someone found out.

***

My laptop went dim from inactivity. It wobbled above the support of my heaving chest. I looked away from the computer screen in hopes to erase the headlines scribbled happily over the front page of ESPN’s website. I felt like I had lost a family member: confusion overruled previously rational thoughts. I tried to envision all possibilities:

*It must have been a clerical error. Dumb interns switch samples all the time!*

*Wrong ballplayer! Some minor leaguer named Brian Raun, probably from the Cubs, got the positive test and ESPN misreported it. Stupid Cubs.*

*Um…maybe it wasn’t steroids? Perhaps it was a sample*
that had gone bad. Is that even possible?

My thoughts became dead weight settling in my bones. The burden of the shock forced me to sink lower and lower into my bed. I reached over and got my phone from the nightstand. I searched for my friend Mona’s name. She too, was a Brewers fan, often giving me team updates while I was away at Pittsburgh for school. If anyone who knew what was going on, it would be her.

*Did you hear about this shit with Braun?* I texted into my phone, and pressed send.

I wanted to be alone in my thoughts, play Kanye West’s H.A.M., Ryan Braun’s walk up song, until my blood pressure lowered. A few feet away, my roommate Rachel and her friends were watching primetime TV. Their howls at witty one-liners and jeers at attractive male leads were discordant in my ear-drums. If I wanted to implore them, it would have to be confined to commercial. I peered above my computer, looked at the three girls, and decided against it. One girl was from Maryland and talked in reference to Peter Angelos, the owner of the Orioles whose bad business decisions had made him something of an enemy in Birdland. More state motto than actual opinion. The other girl was a local from Pittsburgh and (rightly) treated the Pittsburgh Pirates as a mythological team that lived in the sewers of better teams, hoping to ride on the coattails of their successes. As for Rachel, I knew I could never connect with her where baseball was concerned when she sang Take Me Out to the Ballgame with five strikes.

Local support was hopeless.

My phone buzzed. The text message was from Mona:

*Yeah, saw the news on the way back from work. Couldn’t believe it. This is ridiculous.*

*Know anything?* I scrambled to text and pressed send
once more.

Across from where I was sitting, my closet burned with the Ryan Braun shirts that it held: the jersey my father had bought me, the nerdy ‘Braun of the Dead’ shirt Mona got for my birthday, which I wore during my driver’s test (I passed). I had to provide a funeral for these shirts now. What type of eulogy would they receive? Should it be nostalgic, complete with memories of going to Miller Park, and staying up nights in college watching the game on my computer if I was stranded in Pittsburgh? Do I throw them in the fireplace and watch the ashes burn with a bitter smile rolling along my face? I needed to find another Brewer as a role model. Maybe I could use John Axford, the Brewers closer. He’s a film nerd like me, we would have so much to talk about! No longer could I throw up my hands in the Beast Mode pose whenever Braun hit a home run. I couldn’t call him ‘my husband,’ like my other friends affectionately called him. Ryan Braun was a user. No ballplayer came back from that image.

My phone buzzed again. Mona: *Nah, nothing more than what’s reported on ESPN. This is all super weird.*

I hesitated before sending the next message: *Do you think he did it?*

My roommate’s nasally shrieks had reached an octave that I was sure was not invented yet. I needed to leave. I slammed my laptop shut so loud that the three of them jumped. Without stopping to give a justified smirk, I collected my phone, my laptop and my wallet and quietly headed for the door.

“Meaghan, are you okay?” the Orioles fan asked.

“Hm? Oh, yeah,” I answered skittishly. “Bad news from home.”

“Want us to take this party somewhere else?” Rachel
asked, more out of obligation than any desire to move from my blue butterfly chair.

“Nah, it’s cool. I have to do my work anyway,” I said, and then excused myself.

I rushed down the flight of stairs to the lobby of my dorm and made a turn into the computer room. A flash of cold air greeted me as I bustled inside and set my stuff down on the couch. I sat myself down and opened up my laptop. I stared at the screen, dumfounded.

I took my phone out of my pocket and noticed that I had an unread message.

You know what? I honestly have no fucking clue what to think, Mona said.

I sighed. I closed off work I had for other classes and went back on Google, typing in ‘Ryan Braun uses PEDs,’ to see what else came up. It was time to get educated.
“They’re going to burn the bridge.”
“What?”
“They’re going to burn the bridge if you don’t come down.”
“I won’t come down.”
“They’re going to burn you if you don’t come down.”
I clung tighter to the construction’s steel suspender cables. “I’ll jump.”
Leslie sighed. Her demeanor was so hopeless I thought she might cry. She looked back at the row of police officers and lifted one hand to her brow. They’d (finally) put their rifles down. They stood, clad in black and sunglasses, some with little peaked hats. Most had mustaches or goatee combos like The Village People. Others were bald with aviators like Tom Morello. Behind them, a crowd of onlookers. More police were brought in to help maintain order, but from my perspective on the bridge, it seemed like the crowd was calm. At least, no one was pushing to get a good look at the dumb girl “about to jump.” A little off to the left, a hotdog vendor set up shop. At first, it seemed as though the surprisingly diverse mix of spectators were disgusted that he tried to capitalize on “the situation.” By hour two, most people had hotdogs adorned with chunky-sweet relish, yellow or brown mustard, and ketchup. Lots and lots of ketchup. Like—do you want a hotdog with your ketchup? —ketchup.

Next to hotdog vendor was a Channel Nine news van. This, I thought, wasn’t entirely necessary. Most people had
camera phones and I assumed they were either taking photos or videos, then posting to YouTube. Maybe one would even go viral and have remakes like, “Dramatic Gopher,” set to “Bitter-sweet Symphony” by The Verve or “Champagne Supernova” by Oasis. You know—something quintessentially 90s and found in one of those compilation sets with names like, So 90s! In the commercial they show clips from music videos by Pearl Jam and Dr. Dre while song titles in bold yellow letters scroll up the screen like movie credits. They offer a special deal for the next ninety (get it?) minutes. Get the complete set for only $19.99 and we’ll throw in So 80s! I imagine social networking sites lit aflame with mock hash-tags like #JustDoIt.

“Jasmine.”
“No. I’ll jump.”

She sighed again and stalked back to the police officers. I watched as they made hand gestures in the wind. They forcefully pointed with open palms at me. I didn’t know how long it went on, but I felt my body tremble in the light breeze sweeping past me. I couldn’t help but let my gaze fall slightly as I looked out over the river. The wind was fondling it, too. Hussy. It got the wide expanse of water so excited that light sprays were liberated from the dark body before dissipating in the air. The remnants of the droplets cast little rainbows in the sunlight, then without warning, they swiftly dispersed and took with them any evidence of their existence.

The rise and fall of the waves reminded me of waves of sugary, cream cheese icing whipping around in a mixing bowl. Each circular layer folded neatly into the next one. I imagined miraculously smooth hands—even though they were working hands—cooking and baking. My mother baked cake all day long in her pastry shop. She made me carrot cake whenever painting made me lonely. She makes the icing with cream

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cheese, butter, sugar, and vanilla. From the time I was young, she baked the cakes (White Almond, Espresso, or Pink Champagne), whipped the icing (Amaretto, Orange Ginger, or Chocolate Truffle), and then let my sister Leslie and I lick the bowls and rubber spatulas. The taste was so emblazoned in my memory that I felt my mouth twitch. I realized I hadn’t seen my mother in a long time.

The thought of food and waves and mothers made my head swim dizzily. My legs were weak, but I didn’t dare come down. It occurred to me that I’d probably be arrested. They would never believe that all I wanted was to get a better view. No. You climb up one bridge in your entire life and suddenly you’re public enemy number one. You’re a psycho-radical deep in the throes of drug addiction. If not prison, certainly another type of institution. I’d be locked away with no key. Not even a key mold. Not even a handle on the door. Leslie jogged back to me, seemingly more determined than before.

“They’re going to burn the bridge.”

I let myself dramatically stare out over the river. The sun was starting to go down and the sky resembled a Cezanne painting. Or maybe Van Gogh. No. Wait. He’s too cliché. Maybe Degas? You know...if he painted skies like he painted tutus. “Jaz,” Leslie said. Her dark face was haggard, her hair was matted to her sweaty skull as pinkish rosettes nestled themselves in the hollows of her high-boned cheeks. Her cotton t-shirt had large damp stains forming between her breasts and under her arms. I wondered how I must’ve looked. Was my dark face as bludgeoned by unforgiving sunlight as hers was? Did the sweat between my legs look like I pissed myself? Or did my jogging shorts mask it? Jesus.

“They’re going to burn the bridge.”

“You said that, Les.”
“Well shit, Jaz, why can’t you just get down?”
My eyes trailed to the four lanes of pothole-riddled pavement. True. I was too afraid to climb up through the suspension, so I settled for standing on the railing. I hugged myself to one of the tall cables reaching towards the sky.

Hours ago, I’d attempted to perch myself on the thick metal rails of the bridge. As I walked on, I realized that the sway was a high I’d never felt before, and had the impulse to push myself further—further than I had in a long time. I’d wedged my Adidas in between the balusters and held loosely to the railing cap. I remember gasping in awe of the panoramic view of the gorgeous cityscape. Just as I started to feel very peaceful and very pure in a foreign place, an elderly woman snatched at my back. Her talon-like fingernails scratched my shoulder. The scratches still burned.

“What are you doing?” Her words had bite at the end. She was so irritated with me and she didn’t even know my name. I’d tried my best to free myself of her claw-like grip. She was short, with a sunhat and thick-rimmed glasses. Her lips pursed the way my mother’s might if she were really angry, the only difference was this woman’s wrinkles deepened around her mouth. I’d just passed the old woman moments ago while running. I slowed once getting to the bridge, having watched it sway somewhat to the left just as I was about to step upon the vast threshold. Up close, the looming bridge made me realize how cool my own sweat was against my skin. She must have been pretty fit for an elderly woman to have caught up with me like that. “That water’s filthy, you know,” she barked.

“Oh my God!” called a middle-aged man nearby. He walked with his small son and came from the opposite direction. “Someone call the police!”

“Get down!” yelled the old woman. She was still trying
to pull me away. When she couldn’t, she started whacking me with her solid cross-body purse.

“Get off!” was all that came to my mind and, incidentally, to my mouth. I climbed up the railing, and supported myself with the cables—the very ones I now rest against. The bridge swayed ominously again, cackling a rusty belly laugh as it moved lazily back and forth. That time, it was much stronger than before. My arms and legs folded themselves around the cold metal—every muscle worked to prevent me from falling over the edge. Suddenly, the bridge got higher, the river much wider, and the old woman’s face morphed into a gargoyle’s sneer.

“You’re three feet off the ground!” Leslie whined. I forgot she was there. Her hand darted like a serpent at me, quick and deadly, but I wrapped myself tighter. She jerked and tugged my hooded sweater, but I couldn’t let go. Behind her, I could hear the roar of the people creating a crescent shape at the end of the bridge. We have always been equally matched in strength and this moment was no different. We were both getting out of breath, but then she reached deep inside herself and invoked some sort of Hulkian strength like a fucking Sailor Scout or something, and gave one final pull. She displaced some of my fingers, but out of my own Thunder Cat-like instincts, I kicked her away. She held her chest in the same place my foot had just been, and looked enraged. I clung again, breathless.

“Tell them to burn the bridge, Les.”

“You’re a fucking idiot, you know that?” She stormed off. More pissed off hand gesturing from the police officers and Leslie. Like most older sisters, she was only trying to save me from myself.

An officer held up a megaphone to his mustachioed lip. “Young lady, this is your last chance. Get down, or we will burn
the bridge.”
A Day at the Pier  

by Rachael Owen

Heat was bearing down. Seagulls flew close to the ground, scooping up the dropped food with their beaks. There was, nearby, the sound of ocean waves beating against rock and beach. And even closer, the combined noise of arcade games, children crying, and music playing from fun houses added to the discord. With summer ending and the days of fall looming ahead, the pier was teeming with people.

There were young families with strollers that bumped along the boardwalk, groups of teens laughing loudly as they waited in line for rides. The birds that flew down to grab a dropped fry came in competitive packs, never alone. Amongst it all, one girl stood separate, with a steadfast gaze aware only of the ocean’s waves.

Somewhere, a young girl dropped her ice cream cone, bursting into tears as the scoop of chocolate made impact with the ground. A merry-go-round began to spin and emitted a simple tune. A roller coaster finally reached the top of its first hill and the screams reached all throughout the pier. A young boy used the last of his quarters on yet another arcade game. And still, the girl stood alone, moving silently towards the railing and the powerful ocean that it protected pressing crowds from.

The little girl, still crying, picked up her ice cream and tried to wipe away the sand and dirt, to no avail. The merry-go-round started to move along at its slow pace, entertaining the small, happy children riding it. The roller coaster had made it down the first hill and was beginning to race through loops. The arcade game starting up, the boy’s attention was focused strictly on the screen in front of him. The girl had reached the
railing and jumped onto it, swinging her legs over and letting them dangle above the strong waves to feel the salt from ocean mist.

The little girl, covered in sand and melted ice cream, was finally noticed by her mother. The merry-go-round continued to move and play music, but started to lose its charm and interest for the children. The roller coaster started to lose momentum as it finished the final hill and moved slowly along the last, flat rail. The young boy, his sweaty hands slipping on the controllers, lost his final life and simply waited for the game to give him his tickets. The girl was still sitting on the railing, staring down at the ocean and looking along the beach, watching the tide rise and fall.

No one approached her. She looked into the blue-green depths, the strong waves and their foam that continued to beat relentlessly against the pier, the rocks, the beach. She slid off her shoes and let them fall into the blue, watery abyss. No one noticed. Her feet now bare, she planted them on the hot railing and stood. People walked by, most on their way to an exit, and still, no one stopped for her, no one saw her or cared to. She closed her eyes and let her feet slide away, following her shoes as she allowed herself to be consumed by the deep blue abyss.

The little girl, wiped clean by her fussing mother, happily enjoyed a new ice cream cone. Sleepy children climbed off of the merry-go-round horses and into the arms of parents. The roller coaster finished its final ride of the day as its passengers climbed off in pursuit of a new thrill. The young boy grabbed his tickets from the game and hurried to redeem them at the prize counter. The girl’s body hadn’t surfaced.

The day was ending, the sun was setting, and still, the tide rises, the tide falls*.

*This line is borrowed from “The Tide Rises, the Tide Falls”, by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow.
Tennessee

by Melissa Frye

*A railroad is like a lie -- you have to keep building to it to make it stand.* –Mark Twain

The train ride from Pittsburgh to Washington DC is woven with dazzling scenes of wilderness worthy of a frontier tale and melancholy ghettos. It seems as if the train only passes through the most untouched and the most depressed areas on earth. Sometimes the people inside the train seem the same as the landscape. The people share the faintest touches of the best of humanity and the lowliest of mankind.

I met Marty on the train platform in the Pittsburgh station, a Marlboro clutched between his yellowed thumb and forefinger. Marty had the face of a twitchy weasel and shallow, lonely eyes. It was almost too easy to sit down beside the fidgety little man and flash an innocent smile. Anyone in his right mind would have wondered why a decent-looking twenty-year old woman would want to be anywhere close to Marty. He had the look of a man that had spent years connoisseurng sleazy clubs and the seedy late night motels on the side of the freeway.

“Do you have a light?” I asked, motioning to Marty as I pulled a pack of Virginia Slims out of my backpack. Marty slung his hand into his pocket and withdrew the dented, silver Zippo. He flicked the top and drew out the flame with the ease of a professional chain smoker. Seven cigarette butts already dappled the platform around Marty’s feet. I could tell his eyes were cataloguing me from head to toe. Two ears, one nose, two eyes- green, two lips –chapped, blond hair- probably natural, freckles – too numerous to note. My appearance was different enough to get me noticed and but not enough to make anyone
remember me. That’s what worked best.

“You smoke much?” Marty said in a hoarse murmur. I wondered if he’d actually spoken to another soul since he’d arrived in Pittsburgh. I answered with a minimal shrug of one shoulder, my lips tilting in a wry smile.

“When I have ‘em,” I replied, letting the twang of country breeding leak into my voice. Marty grunted and took a long drag on his cigarette. He studied me from the corner of his eyes.

“You from West Virginia?” he asked, his rough voice tripping up over the normalcy of the conversation. Marty seemed like the kind of man that spent most of his time talking to women from behind a bar. I kept him off balance with another smile, shy this time.

“Yeah. I’m heading home for a wedding.”

“Yours?” he asked in a funny way. I doubted Marty knew the first thing about picking up a decent woman, but he got credit for trying.

“Naw,” I giggled, tucking a strand of that almost natural blond hair behind my ear. I could almost fake a blush in the low lighting of six a.m. in Pittsburgh, “My cousin’s wedding.”

“You know what they say about West Virginians?” Marty snickered; his mouth tilted up like it was some great dirty joke.

“No.”

“It’s all relative in West Virginia!” Marty cackled. Something broke loose in his chest, hacking and bouncing around as he slapped a yellowed hand over his mouth. I smiled and looked away, feigning mild discomfort.

Some ways up the platform the conductor whistled the all aboard. I got to my feet, flicking the half-finished cigarette to the ground before I swung my backpack up on to my shoulder.

“I suppose I won’t be seeing you again,” Marty
murmured almost wistfully. I ignored the pain in my gut and smiled.

“I guess not,” I replied and headed off for the train, Marty’s wallet safely tucked inside my coat pocket.

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Patricia found me, oddly enough. I hadn’t marked her like I had Marty. Patricia Moore is a middle aged, gray in the temples secretary for a Chicago school district. She loved children, especially babies. I imagined she’d never found the right man to marry and raise up her own family with. There had probably been one boy, in high school, but he’d been sent to Vietnam after graduation and had never returned. Patricia was the type of woman who would dream sometimes that he was still out there, surviving like a modern day Robinson Crusoe in the jungles.

“Where are you headed sweetie?” Patricia asked as she set down her soft, pear shaped form in the chair beside mine. I made a quick glance up and down the observation deck and then smiled at Patricia.

“I’m headed to Maryland,” I murmured.

“All by yourself? But you’re so young!” Patricia had gasped, putting a large hand to her bosom. I allowed myself a shy smile and ducked my head.

“I’m older than I look,” I replied. Patricia had hummed a little laugh, shaking her mousy brown head.

“Hold on to that honey. You’ll miss that when it’s gone. I see all these girls where I work, so worried about growing up quick and getting boyfriends and jobs and money. Sometimes I keep wanting to tell them ‘Slow down baby, you’re gonna miss this when it’s gone.’ But those kind of girls, they won’t ever listen to me,” Patricia mourned as she pulled her knitting needles
from her purse.

“What are you making?” I inquired.

“Oh! It’s just a baby’s blanket. I’m going to visit my niece in Florida. She just had a baby, a little boy. This is her third baby. I just love those little babies. My niece is always complaining about how they wreck the house and how they’re always crying. She keeps talking about getting her tubes tied this summer so she won’t get pregnant again. It would be a waste,” Patricia sighed, dabbing the corner of her dewy eyes with her yarn.

“I happen to be visiting my sister in Baltimore. She’s just had triplets,” I remember telling Patricia, hoping my face was as excited as I pitched my voice. Patricia’s eyes beamed as she smiled and for a moment, I could almost see that she was once very pretty. Not gorgeous, but pretty.

“What a blessing! Triplets,” Patricia cooed, “Are you excited to see the babies?”

“Oh, I don’t know,” I’d murmured, looking to my lap, “My sister’s boyfriend ran off when she told him she was pregnant and then she lost her job when she couldn’t work anymore. Now she got no insurance and three little mouths to feed. I don’t know what she’ll do.”

“Oh, the poor dear,” Patricia whispered with the decency of a good Christian not to mutter about wedlock and single mothers. Patricia’s soft, ample arms enfolded me in a hug and she whispered tender things into my hair. I thought she would have been a good mother. I got up after the hug, feigning the need to dry my eyes in the ladies. Patricia nodded understandingly and I walked away. I decided not to steal Patricia’s entire wallet, but instead I only take a freshly pressed fifty.

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I watched with a sort of detachment as Marty stumbled off the
train at Harper’s Ferry, brushing ash from his sport jacket. It’s was in a desperate need of a good pressing. I tried not to wonder how he’d pay for his booze and seedy motel that night.

Patricia waved me off the train in D.C. with a sincere smile and a half-finished baby blanket flag. I was almost certain Patricia would remember me. It actually makes me a little sad now. Marty and me, we’re a like in a lot of ways. We’re vagabonds in our own lives, moving from here to there without any real purpose. Patricia Moore could have had a good life. Maybe a three bedroom home in Lincoln Heights with her husband, a high school sweetheart and Vietnam vet. Maybe Patricia would have been seeing her kids off to college right now, dabbing her eyes on the corner of her lacy handkerchief while her hubby squeezes her waist with parental pride as their baby makes their way up the platform to receive their diploma. Patricia would have deserved that life. Instead she’ll placate herself with her niece’s snot nosed, screaming brats in Florida. Marty will pass out in a bar somewhere or maybe stumble home with a bar-fly who’s name he’ll have to guess in the morning. Barb, Betty, Bunny?

Me. Well…

“Where are you headed?” the porter ask, throwing me a grin. I can’t even smile now.
“Home.”
“Where’s home?” he asks, handing me single piece of luggage.
“Tennessee.”
“Oh, nice country out there. Family reunion?” he jokes.
“A funeral.”
“Oh,” he pauses, his smile slipping, “I’m so sorry.”
“Don’t bother,” I sigh, “I never knew him anyways. I suppose the Warden will have a few nice words to say about
poppa and his thirty odd year stay in Jackson County Correc-
tional.”

The porter doesn’t say anything else as I walk away. Sometimes the truth is the hardest part.
Alaina’s tennis shoe clad feet pounded through the sand, golden in the early December morning light. The forty-degree temperatures and even colder Atlantic forced the tourists to abandon Hatteras Island, leaving the beach unloved and desolate. That was the way Alaina preferred it.

This morning, Alaina had left her Ipod sitting on her dresser. There was something about the steady inhaling and exhaling of the ocean onto the shore mixing with her own labored breathing that made it seem oddly intimate. Except for the other die hard athletes and ever present sand dwelling ghost crabs, Alaina was alone on the beach—it was too early for the dog walkers and the few remaining stragglers from tourist season, convinced that the off season was better to visit because of the drop in rental housing prices. They found out too late that the unforgiving Atlantic was too cold to play in this time of year.

Her calves were warmed and tingling with every stretching stride she took. Alaina relished this; she focused on the looming outline of the pier in the distance, the symbol that Alaina set as her turn around point. She sucked in the salty air, pushing it loudly out through her nose. She ran twice daily, usually incorporating a variety of muscular toning exercises into her routine. After all, it was impossible to become as graceful or powerful as Lolo Jones without serious dedication. It was a personal conviction that Alaina would be making it to the Rio Games—they were only four years away.

Today felt different though. Even the gray clouds seemed to hang lower over the ocean. Seagulls gawked at her—black eyes glittering in the steely morning. Alaina shoved forward through the thick sand, translucent ghost crabs skittering
over the toe of her shoes. Her breathing became heavier in the thick air, weighing down her lungs. She had to stop. Alaina doubled over, folding herself in half over the sand. She felt her stomach roll as she stared at the granules of sand. Alaina crouched down and planted her hands in the earth, the sand smooth on her fingers.

The beach stilled. The sound of the waves seemed to disappear in a deafening silence. Even the lazy screeches of the birds died away. The clouds rolled overhead and in the silence Alaina swore she could hear them growling through the sky. She closed her eyes and caught her breath, counting slowly to ten, picking herself up off the sand. Alaina looked out into the wild rolling sea. A cluster of birds were hovering beyond the breaking point, wings flapping frantically against one another. She squinted at what they were diving for and picking at.

Alaina’s ears stopped pounding deafness into them and started pumping in sound again. The seagulls were screeching, nervously upset with their floating meal.

“Oh God,” Alaina murmured. She tore at her long sleeve shirt, peeling it over her head to reveal the layers of Under Armour underneath. Alaina bolted into the surf, the freezing water snapping at her skin. Her tennis shoes filled with water, but she didn’t stop to think. Alaina struggled through the water, her hands quickly going numb. Her teeth chattered violently, sometimes catching her lips between them. The mishaps sent a tingling through her lips; the feeling was already being lost. Her shoes burrowed into the smooth sand on the ocean floor.

Alaina kept going, kept moving her way towards the group of birds, towards their target. From the beach she could only see the dim outline of a human form through the waves, but as she got closer she could see the hulking mass more clearly. He was definitely human. His arms didn’t flail, jsut merely
lazed through the water. He had to be near death by now. The frigid water wrapped around her, slowing her down. Her shoes fumbled on the bottom of the unstable ocean floor.

“Hang—on—I’m—coming.”

Alaina reached the man and grabbed for him, the waves pitching around her neck, almost swallowing her. His arms were bulbous, his hands swollen clubs. It was impossible for him to be out here. His tanned skin was starting to take on a sickly green hue, his eyes lolling back into his head. It seemed that thick milky gauze had grown over his pupils, giving his eyes the appearance of an oracle. Even in the cold her skin felt hot with adrenalin. He spoke no words, just indecipherable moans.

“Shhhh,” Alaina murmured, reaching for his shoulders to haul him into shore. Through the white film Alaina noticed his eyes lock on her. She tried to move with the tide, to pull him with the swell of the waves. She felt his cold hand grab her shoulder.

“It’s okay, we’re going to get you back to the beach.” Alaina tried to soothe him, but she felt him pulling her back.

“Please don’t fight—this will be much easier if you just float.” Alaina kept digging her toes into the sand, but he kept pulling her back.

“What are you doing?” His fingers gripped her firmly. She could feel him dragging her under. She surfaced, splashing and gasping for air. Her instinct told her to keep moving, to get out now. His hold was stronger now. Alaina cried out to the desolate beach. His teeth sank into her. She gasped and her skin felt prickled and hot and he ripped away her flesh. The searing pain paralyzed her, her flesh detaching from her muscle and bone as he tore Alaina’s shoulder. Her head ducked under the waves, the cold water suffocating her. The salt water filled her
lungs. Alaina rose to the surface and took one last sputtering breath, the man tearing through the skin on her arm, before succumbing to the fever that had taken hold of her body. Alaina’s world went black.
Smoke Screen: An Excerpt  
by Jayelle Cumberledge

“My name is Lark Emerson.” The camera light was a steady red, to tell her it was listening to her every word. Its lens captured the woman in an unappealing light, but it was clear that in normal circumstances (if dark bags did not sit beneath her eyes, if she had applied her usual amount of makeup, if the red light didn’t give her skin a Hellish glaze) she might be considered ‘pretty.’ “I am leaving London on a red-eye flight—”

“Ma’am.” Her head turned to someone off screen, and a rustling was heard, before finally: “… not during take off.”

“But it’s not wireless or anything—”

A soft, yet stern and apologetic, whisper emitted. The camera couldn’t catch it.

“Fine. Alright.”

The screen went black.

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All her life, Lark Emerson was described in degrees of separation from her older, twin sister. Where Sky was conversationally majestic, Lark tended to pepper too many expletives into her every day language. While Sky always appeared on the verge of wrapping her arms around someone and hugging them close, people tended to keep a step or two back from Lark. The joke was: “She’s either about to hit you or kiss you, and neither’s gonna end well for ya, mate.” The joker usually ended up with a quick smack in the arm and guilty grin. While Sky tended to stay in, Lark was almost consistently out, and when, in middle school, Sky tried convincing her twin to switch to a vegan lifestyle, Lark had purposely ordered a cheeseburger.

Such were their differences, that when the time finally came for their mother to reveal the family’s best kept secret, it
was Sky who took an immediate interest in it, and Lark who immediately called her biological father to ask if she could live with him. She made a strong argument: a grown woman believing in such occult bullshit, just because some old woman had written an illegible book with funky pictures and passed it down in her family for eleven generations. He still told her she needed to stay with her mother.

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“There we go. That’s a little better.” *The young woman was back, though this time, it was a webcam that captured her image. She sat in a darkly lit living room. There was just enough light emitting from an off-camera desk lamp for the laptop to capture a great dog curling up on the sofa behind her.* “Feels sorta weird using her laptop, but I suppose she won’t be needing it anymore. Anyway, I want to record everything that happens from here on in. If you’ve found these recordings because I’m dead or missing, keep listening and you’ll probably figure out how and why. If you’re just a common thief, fuck off then, ‘cause none of this will be of any interest to you.”

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The Emersons were a strange family, and the people who knew them knew it. They named their children almost exclusively after things found in nature (the twin’s mother was named “Daisy,” their grandfather “River”) and, typically, it was the husbands who took the daughters’ last name upon marriage (the last person to go against this was Chickadee May Emerson, previously Chickadee May Tittensor, whose own granddaughter chose to reinstate it in her marriage years later). They kept journals from their ancestors, and knew that many of the people in their family were persecuted while the witch-fear epidemic ravaged Europe.

It wasn’t entirely unfair to put them on trial way back
then. For, indeed, the Emersons even believed themselves to be of some magical property. Some claimed to be able to conjure strange beings from thin air, while others still thought themselves to be in communication with the dead.

Of course, well into the 21st century, Lark had called bullshit on her family, and left home as soon as she turned 18. She kept in contact, but only spontaneously. She spent most of her young adult years in smoky bars, singing karaoke to drunken strangers who all clapped for her, though never seemed to remember her the next time she took the stage. During the day, she waited tables to pay for a cramped apartment for herself and a few off-again, on-again boyfriends. Occasionally she would call her father for help paying the bills, but otherwise avoided her parents almost entirely.

Out of three aunts, two parents, two uncles, and a grandfather who was still a mean old bastard, even at 85, she only kept in constant contact with her sister. While Lark was out singing to blues and barely getting by on her minimal wage, Sky was graduating university at the top of her class, and working all through the night to decode the book their grandmothers from centuries back had left them.

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“But Lark, listen!”

This was an old conversation; Lark’s exact replica grinned at her excitedly from an apartment thousands of miles away, in a city, in a state, in a country she had never seen. A puppy was running back and forth across a couch in the background, but the woman on the screen moved closer, so that all Lark could see was a face—her face, really—staring meaningfully at her.

“Sky,” Lark whined, the older model laptop bouncing the camera wildly from her lap while she wiggled her legs like a child. “I’m tired. And your boring Satanist crap just makes it worse.”
Her twin ignored her, moving away to pick up a book. She opened it up, and pushed the inked drawing into the camera.

“But just look!”

“I don’t see anything.” She truly didn’t. The picture was highly abstract, and digitalized on top of that. It appeared to be a dark mass, encircled by a red line, which ignored the boundaries of a page, and connected to itself beyond the crease of the book. Scribbles—letters, she would soon find out—were sprawled across the top right corner.

“This!” Her sister tapped excitedly on the scribbles. “This! It’s an old language. Like. Dead-language old. Like. Even great grandma May wouldn’t have any clue about it when she was writing the book in the first place!”

“So?”

There was a pause, as the girl on the screen brought the book down to look at it. “I don’t know,” she admitted. “But the language is related to a Turkish dialect that still exists today. A friend of mine says it means something about a blood ritual or something, but he’s not sure. Still! Lark! It’s a break through! It really is. We’ve finally identified one of the languages in this stupid thing!”

“It’s not ‘we’, Sky. It’s you.”

Sky smiled. “It’s intriguing though, right?”

“So interesting.” Lark yawned. “I’m going to bed, sissy.” “Alright. G’night! Love you!” She made kissy faces at the screen as Lark rolled her eyes and shut the computer.

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The book itself was not an original. It was the habit of the family to make copies when more children were born, and when the pages began to look a bit too faded. The latest copy, which Sky had worked to, was undoubtedly bastardized. Still, she worked through it obsessively; Lark even suspected that
Sky’s major at the university was simply a means of gaining more generalized knowledge that could help her.

When the twins spoke, it was always about the book for Sky: about the many languages it was written in, about the bizarre drawings and foreign symbols. Lark had tried to listen. In her current state, sister-less, she wished she had tried harder.

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She lit a cigarette in the current year, breathed it in, then spoke to the screen through her exhale. “My name is Lark Emerson. Six months ago my sister was found dead in a warehouse in Boston, and quite frankly I’m bored as shit waiting for the police to get off their asses and find out who—or what—killed her. That’s why I’ll be having an extended stay in Boston.” Her eyebrows twitched upward. “Well. That, and the apartment is rent controlled.”
“I don’t want to eat anymore,” Garret cried as he dropped the apple on the table in front of him.

“We’ve been back two days,” Skyla reminded him, “and you haven’t eaten more than two bites of anything.” She picked up the nearly whole apple and held it in front of his face. Garret kept his arms crossed and a scowl on his face. Eventually, he leaned forward to take the apple between his teeth while still holding Skyla’s gaze. She wondered how long it would take him to realize he would need his hand if he didn’t want the whole apple in his mouth.

Finally Garret broke their staring contest, sat back, and curled his fingers around the yellow and red surface. Skyla could hear his teeth wedging their way into the flesh of the juicy fruit. He slurped in the escaping juices before tearing a piece away from its remaining connections of skin. She could hear the loud crack as his molars broke the piece in two. His jaw moved to create three more cracking bites. On the last chew there was no sound.

Garret’s jaw clenched and his eyes teared as he tried not to swallow his mouth’s contents. Skyla handed him a paper napkin. He brought it close to his lips and bent his head forward. When he opened his mouth a pile of clumpy, grey ash filled the napkin. He was able to move the pile away from his mouth before the particles tickling at the back of his throat pushed forward an involuntary cough. The first few times he had tried to spit the debris out he had coughed right away, sending a smoky dust everywhere. He was finally starting to learn.

“I can’t keep doing this, Skyla.” He looked at the pile of ash sitting before them.
“I told you not to eat the food.” She shook her head, leaning back in her chair. “If you learned anything from grandma in all these years it should have been not to eat the food in Faerie. Everyone knows that. It’s the biggest rule.”

“Faerie doesn’t exist!”

“I think the apple you just turned into ash would beg to differ.” Skyla picked up the napkin and threw it in the trash on her way out the door.

“What am I supposed to do, Skyla?” Garret called after her. She shrugged her shoulders but did not turn back to face him. He’s lucky enough we were able to get out, she thought as she pushed the door open and headed toward the woods.

Skyla made her way through the maze of tall Oaks, trying to remember the path they had taken two night nights earlier, before her brother had eaten the berries. Two nights ago she had been doing the dishes after the two of them had a small dinner together. She stared out the window above the sink absentmindedly while Garret sat in front of the TV. It took a while for her to notice the small stream of smoke twisting its way up towards the glowing moon and countless stars. Without a thought she dropped the bowl back in the water-filled sink, grabbed her sweater, walked passed Garret and out through the back door.

“Where are you going?” Garret immediately stood and followed his sister into the trees. She allowed him to catch up before pointing toward the sky. The light of the bright, full moon broke through the branches.

“It’s the Honey Moon.”

“What?”

“They’re celebrating the midsummer’s night.” Skyla quickened her pace, ducking under branches and hopping over
exposed roots. “Everything is in full bloom. They’ll spend the night dancing and collecting herbs and other plants from the forest. They’re honoring the healing properties and powers of the earth.”

“Who?” Garret struggled to keep up with his sister’s determination. He tripped over the roots and ended up with a few branches to the face. He began to wish he had spent as much time in the trees as his sister had all those summers. His heart raced a little faster each time he had to look down to check his footing, fearing he would lose track of her silhouette. They were in the middle of the woods now. If he lost her he would have no way of getting out.

“The Fey,” Skyla answered without a pause.

“You have got to be kidding me,” Garret stopped walking. “You’re going to get us lost in the woods for some made up story grandma used to tell? I think her absence is going to your head a bit Sky.”

“SHHH” she turned and hissed at him, ignoring his inability to believe. “I just want to get close enough to see them. Nobody said you had to come with me. You did that on your own. So either be quiet or go back.” Garret stayed quiet, as he did not know which direction the house stood. They crept farther and farther into the woods until they could hear the music and smell the smoke off the fire.

“I didn’t know there were cabins or anything this deep in the woods. What are they, some kind of cult? How did they even find anything in the dark?” Garret asked, needing a logical explanation for what he was seeing. The only answer he got from Skyla was another hushed warning. “You’re even crazier than they are,” Garret mumbled to himself. The twins dared to move closer.

Skyla could hardly contain herself. For eleven years she
had dreamed of this moment. But she remembered all of her grandmother’s stories. As much as she desired to be a part of their festival she knew it was safer to stay back and observe. She left Garret on the trail just before it opened up into the clearing. She found two trees growing fairly close together, crouched down and watched.

Shadowy figures moved around the fire, its light catching on their clothing’s gold embellishments and in their eyes. Skyla was captivated with their movements. The main circle consisted of about a dozen dancers that created a ring around the fire. They were able to anticipate their partner’s steps as they orbited. Each creature varied in appearance. The ones sitting around the dancers looked sinister, wearing red caps or flashing their long, crooked fingernails. Their sharp teeth formed a sneering grin and their noses looked as though they had been broken two or three times.

The ones making up the dance circle were quite beautiful with long hair and tall features. Both the men and women adorned their locks with a number of braids and flowers. The men kept one hand on their partner’s lower back as they paraded around the circle. They wore long shirts and tight pants while the women thin, loose gowns. Some shimmered in the firelight while others seemed to be mostly sheer. The smoke embraced each couple before making its way toward the moon. Skyla couldn’t look away.

“Can we go yet?” Garret’s voice broke her out of the trance. “You’ve been watching them for like an hour. These people are weird.” Skyla turned to face her brother. He had a handful of what looked like precious stones, though he held one to his purple stained lips. Skyla recognized the food of the fae immediately.

“Are you crazy!” She knocked the berries out of his hand
and away from his mouth.

“Hey,” Garret objected, “those where good.”

“How many have you eaten?”

“Enough,” a musical voice came from behind Skyla. She turned to face one of the taller creatures. His silver hair fell in a braid down his back, exposing the pointed tips of his ears. His face had soft features, though his icy blue eyes pierced through her. “Enough that some have started to notice.”

“Garret, run,” Skyla tried to shield her brother. He gave no objection and disappeared in the darkness, tripping over roots as he went.

“It’s no use trying to protect him,” the faery gave a smile that might win over the less knowledgeable, “but he belongs to Faerie now.” In one swift movement Skyla ripped her grandmother’s iron pendant from around her neck, exposed the point, and buried in his chest.

His glamour immediately started to fade away. He fell to the soft dirt floor; a crimson sludge began soaking through the front of his white tunic. His skin became translucent and his cheeks hollow. The whole of his eye turned black and what was left of his silver hair became thin and brittle. His smile had faded, but still exposed his now yellow and cracked teeth. His black eyes haunted Skyla as she navigated her way back through the trees to the house, where Garret was waiting.
“A place belongs forever to whoever claims it hardest, remembers it most obsessively, wrenches it from itself, shapes it, renders it, loves it so radically that he remakes it in his own image.”

- Joan Didion

During the fall of 2006, I turned my car onto 54th Street and drove down the leaf-cluttered road. The last of the autumn leaves clung to the towering trees like a raindrop dangles on the tip of a flower’s petal. Winter was near and the trees were the first sign that the landscape soon would be frozen and white. All the warm colors of the fall would be raked into plastic garbage bags and collected on Thursdays.

I wouldn’t normally notice small changes on my block, but that fall day the change was hard to miss. Large unnatural orange rings marked the trunk of several elm trees on the boulevard. I parked my car in front of my elm and she too had an orange ring. The florescent spray paint dripped down the crevices of her bark and stood out like a hunter’s winter jacket in the middle of the forest. I grabbed my school bag from the back of the car and hurried into the house, trying my best to not stare at the mark.

“Why are all the trees on the block marked?” I asked my parents at dinner that night.

“Because they feel like it, Erin,” my little brother Nick teased.

I glared at him from across the table and in return his tongue darted out of his mouth.

“The city is gonna cut em’ down,” my dad answered me,
not looking up from his plate.

“But why? There are six trees marked out there.”

“All of them have Dutch elm disease. They have to come
down so it doesn’t spread further.”

In Saint Paul, Minneapolis’s twin city, Dutch elm dis-
ease was discovered in the late sixties. By the seventies, the tree
disease had hit every county in the state. Biologists collected
samples and data from multiple trees around the state and
found the disease was infecting the south, north, east, and west
quadrants of Minnesota. Elms that had been standing for cen-
turies were being cut down until the forest landscape began to
form patches of missing trees.

The University of Minnesota’s Extension program
released a highly in-depth, seven-part article on Dutch elm dis-
ease in Minnesota in 1993. Historically and socially, the article
points out that most people believed that Minnesota’s northern
climate during the winter would be a harmful atmosphere for
the European elm bark beetles to survive. It’s hard not to believe
the myth when winter temperatures reach negative thirties for
three months and snow can reach up to three to four feet over-
night. How does such a small beetle, an insignificant bug about
the size of the tip of a pencil, survive what other insects can’t?

Simple. They burrow themselves into the fibers of the
elm’s bark. Inside they eat away at the wood. If the beetle is
not infected with the disease, the tree can grow normally. The
opposite is true if the beetle is infected with the disease and the
tree falls victim. The symptoms are not noticeable right away.
Slowly the tips of the tree’s leaves brown and fall off like a can-
cer patient’s hair during chemotherapy. Then after the tree has
begun its balding the roots blacken. Sap runs down the trunk in
streaks that look like paintbrush strokes. The process can take
years to finalize. Before the tree ultimately dies, it’s cut down
burned to kill off any beetles that may still remain burrowed within the bark.

Grandma’s cancer had burrowed itself into the fibers of her lungs. Inside it ate away at her body. If my grandma hadn’t been infected with the abnormal cells, she could have grown older. The opposite is true because she did become infected and fell victim. Cancer symptoms are not noticeable right away. Grandma shed weight from her curvy figure quickly. After she began to shrink away, the roots within her lungs began to blacken. Grandma’s sharp wit and sugary disposition ran from her body as the sedative cocktail entered. The process took years to finalize. Before she ultimately died, the morphine cut and burned off any remaining life burrowing within.

“Don’t they have a cure for the trees? Is there some magic fertilizer they can use instead of chopping all of em’ down?”

“Nope. No cure. The best thing for the tree is to cut her down,” my dad answered with a sigh.

“When will the city send someone to cut the tree down?”

“In a month or two. Right before winter. Can’t cut a tree down with five feet of snow surrounding the trunk. The city will saw them down bit by bit until only a stump is left.”

“Aw man! I was hoping they would blow it up or something cooler,” Nick complained.

I rolled my eyes and let the conversation expire. She had been sentenced to death and in a matter of months all that would be left is a stump to remind us of what was once a thick, shading elm tree. Come summer, there would be no shade to cool us from the hundred-degree heat. Her symmetrical pointed leaves would leave a hole for the sun to beat down on the boulevard grass and asphalt street. Black caterpillars wooly like bears won’t inch up her bark. Branches that held curious,
twitching squirrels and gangs of cawing crows will have no place to rest.

The elm had been a base during many games of cops and robbers. She was the perfect shade after a long race around the block and an excellent shield during the many winters of snowball fights. She took a hit so that I never received a fist-sized ball of packed snow and ice to the face, back, or leg. Grandma had been the same. She was the best protector against the double force my brothers created. I'd run around her house while my brothers chased after me and she'd pull me into her lap and hold onto me tight, warding off my brothers’ attempts to capture me.

Two weeks before December in 2005, my grandma had been sentenced to a hospice. The oxygen concentrator she carried around like a designer handbag stopped pushing enough oxygen into her failing lungs. My grandpa couldn’t take care of her, the man didn’t know how to cook or clean a house let alone care for his shrinking wife. So right as the Christmas season began, my grandma moved into a tiny hospice room to begin her journey into death.

I didn’t go visit her until her second week at the hospice. I was sixteen, a junior in high school, and I’d not only had a busy schedule, but I was terrified of anything smelling remotely like the end of days. I’d never experienced a family member dying. I didn't know the proper protocol on how to transition from speaking to a fully alive grandparent to a dying one. There was no class, book, or 'how to' article online that could have held my hand and guided me through the steps. She sat leisurely on the mechanical bed facing the door. A flimsy triangular patterned smock had replaced her usual printed sweatshirt. A tube ran from her nostrils to a giant machine that whizzed every other second. Other clear tubes ran from the
inside of her elbow to twin bags of liquid that dripped to the rhythm of the breathing machine.

I stopped in the doorway and took a moment to collect myself. The scene of her lying in an unfamiliar room with a sour smell caught me off guard. I had planted the image of her sitting in her pink velvet chair, wearing her gaudy sweatshirts, and her glasses sliding down the bridge of her nose. The television would be on some fuzzy pixilated show with the volume muted and the beeps of her electronic solitaire game would sound in the silent house. That was my grandma. The women lying limp in an unfamiliar space was not.

My mother nudged me forward and I shyly inched towards the edge of the bed. Grandma’s eyes were closed and her chest rose in perfect sync. I stood at the edge of the bed as my mother rubbed the wrinkled skin of her hand in small circles.

“Mom, wake up. I brought you a wonderful surprise,” my mom softly spoke into her ear. Slowly my grandma’s eyes slit open and she smiled.

“Erin bon berin,” she whispered out my nickname. “This is a wonderful surprise.”

“Hi Grandma.”

“Have you come to spend some time with me?” She asked, her eyelids dropping.

“She came to tell you about her volleyball tournament she was in last weekend,” Mom answered for me.

Grandma didn’t open her eyelids. The drops of liquid in one of the transparent bags were sedatives. They kept her pain low so that she could be in at least some comfort and peace during her last days.

“I—uh went up to Eden Prairie last weekend for a tournament for Junior Olympics,” I began to say while I continued to watch my grandmother sleep. “We didn’t place in the top five,
but I played really well.”

My mom and I waited for her to spring back to life, but she remained frozen in one position. Her mouth hung open slightly and her manicured hands lay open on either side of her petite and frail body. If the machines behind her weren’t still beeping, I would have thought she was already dead.

“Ben and Nick start spring training for baseball soon and Erin’s volleyball team is gearing up for the big President’s Day tournament in February. They are traveling all the way to Duluth for it,” Mom told her despite the fact the Grandma wasn’t lucid enough to understand what we were telling her.

After twenty minutes of listening to my mother fill Grandma in on life outside the hospice walls, we decided it was time to leave. I leaned over the guardrail of the bed and kissed my grandma’s soft cheek and whispered, “I love you.” My mom repeated the actions, only taking longer to murmur something in her ear.

“Erin,” I heard my name being faintly called as I turned to leave the room. I turned to see that Grandma’s eyes had opened again. “Your purse is too springy for winter.”

I looked down at the pink, yellow, green, and white-striped purse I held loosely in my hand. Grandma’s eyes had closed again, signaling that the drugs were taking hold once more. I chuckled lightly to myself as my mom led us away from the room that I wouldn’t see again.
The Grand Finale

by Alison Taverna

As Harriet sat shotgun, legs on the dashboard, she looked over at Healy and knew that tonight marked the end of something. She couldn’t count the number of times she had found herself in this exact spot. Healy directing the wheel, and Harriet only inches away, letting him. She relaxed her head against the side window and closed her eyes, feeling her body shift with the slow spin of the wheel. When her finger started to tap against the arm of the seat, or when Healy caught her peeking over at the speedometer, he dropped speed by at least 10 miles. At this, Harriet shifted her entire body away from Healy and exhaled, “Maybe I have somewhere else to be.”

After minutes of silence, when any other person would think the conversation was over, Harriet knew to look over at Healy. He always liked to leave periods of air between sentences, to choose his words carefully, like he was hand picking them from a deck of cards. The real problem with people, as Healy would often remind Harriet about herself, was patience. Always somewhere to get, with nowhere to go, Healy would sigh. So Harriet learned to wait, was learning to wait, because she knew Healy would always wait for her.

“‘You don’t have somewhere else to be,’” Healy responded, face blank, eyes never leaving the road.

***

Healy understood Harriet’s unspoken desire to be led without a map. It was due to this desire that Healy took Harriet to places she’d never asked. It became a game for him, finding a vandalized park, a 24 hour diner with flies dead in the light bulbs, or a junkyard. Harriet never complained. She traced her fingers across the spray paint or sat on a rejected tire as Healy
smoked Camels. Harriet liked how Healy took her to places that were neglected, forgotten by the world around them. It was this appreciation for the abandoned that she would miss most about him.

At the end of Harriet’s senior year, she received a last minute scholarship, starting the spring semester, at Framingham State, in Massachusetts. It was an offer her parents wouldn’t let her refuse. While Harriet was moving across the country, Healy was stuck in Boone, working at his dad’s shoe company. Healy never said it, but Harriet knew he would give anything to get out of Colorado, to drive his Corolla past the town limits and then keep driving.

***

“Harriet, wake up. We’re here.”

“What?” Harriet lifted one eye open, slowly. She knew where she was instantly. Healy had parked in front of Timmy’s Last Resort, a midnight to six in the morning pancake house. It was an hour by drive, at least an hour and a half by Healy’s driving. Timmy’s was a small place with faded cream booths and plastic countertops, the stools creaking under the slightest amount of pressure. Gabe, the owner, sat in the corner booth by the window plucking his guitar, some half remembered song from his band days. Yet, when someone came in he jumped up, threw his chef hat on, and as if this added accessory changed his personality, started pouring batter on the griddle. At least once a week Healy would bring Harriet to Timmy’s. Without either of them saying it, Harriet knew their visits were less about the food and more about Gabe.

***

“Is this part of the surprise? Because Heals, I hate to break it to you, I may have been here one or two times before.” Healy pushed open his car door, walked around the hood, and
then opened Harriet’s door.

“Get out.”

“What a gentleman,” Harriet joked, stepping out of the car. From the parking lot Harriet could see Gabe in his usual booth, face bent into the rusted steel strings, a look of mild determination mixed with question as he searched his brain for the right chords.

***

Timmy’s Last Resort wasn’t always a pancake house. The restaurant was started by best friends, Timmy and Gabe, when they graduated college. It was a regular diner, with regular hours, with a regular crowd. Back then it was called The Prickly Napkin, after Timmy and Gabe’s college band. They were actually making a name for themselves with The Prickly Napkin, serving home classics mixed with the recipes they made up from their time on the road, a direct result of eating nothing but hot pockets and peanut butter sandwiches dipped in water. But as quickly as it all started, it ended. Timmy was in a car crash on his way to The Prickly Napkin, hit from the back at 80 by a speeding Sedan, causing his Station Wagon to spin and nosedive into a telephone pole. Gabe closed the restaurant, and then a year later re-opened it as Timmy’s Last Resort, this time only selling pancakes. One of Harriet and Healy’s nights eating pancakes, Gabe slid in the booth next to Healy and told how for 12 months he sat all night in the corner booth of the closed down Prickly Napkin, feeling empty and alone and hungry. He made pancakes in the dark, because the batter was the only thing that soaked up all his emotions. While Gabe ate his large stack, he thought maybe other people were up too, aimlessly looking for something to soak up their thoughts. For the last 15 years, Timmy’s Last Resort had been the refuge for night wanders, providing a free small stack for anyone who looked
especially desperate for the healing powers of fluffy carbs.

“Hey Gabe.” Harriet walked to their normal booth and slid in as Healy nodded his head to Gabe, moving in across from Harriet. Gabe rested his guitar against the window, and with a broad smile and whip of his hat, strutted behind the counter to the kitchen. Harriet watched Gabe through the open cut out of the kitchen, as he began to mix the flour and milk. Still smiling she turned to Healy, who scanned the menu, flicking the corner back and forth with his finger.

“Why do you look at the menu? You get the same thing every time. We both do. I know that. You know that.” Harriet nods her head in Gabe’s direction. “Even he knows that.”

“I’m not looking to change my order. I’m looking to see if anything has changed,” Healy responded, glancing once more at the last page before setting it back on the table. Healy met Harriet’s eyes and for a minute Harriet opened her mouth to speak, but then changed her mind, and leaned back against the booth. As if reading her mind, Healy leaned in, his brown hair falling forward, cutting a diagonal across his forehead.

“You’ll need the pancakes to prepare for the surprise.” Perking up in her seat, Harriet leaned in, meeting Healy halfway, and said in the same low voice,

“Tell me.”

“Not a chance,” Healy laughed, leaning back against the cushion and putting his hands behind his head.

“Come on! You’ve been keeping this a secret for weeks.”

“Hence the word surprise.”

“Listen. How do I know there even is a surprise? For all I know you’re kidnapping me and holding me for ransom so you can afford new break lights.”

“Uncle Jerry’s a mechanic. He gives me free repairs. So I’m set. But my gas money is taking a hard hit, now that you
mention it…”

“Funny.”

Gabe walked over humming, cradling the stacks of pancakes. “Here you go guys.” He ripped off the paper bill and sat it down next to the plates. Gabe looked back and forth between Harriet and Healy. When neither of them spoke, Gabe prodded.

“So what’s the place for tonight?” Gabe knew their game, or rather, Healy’s game. He was always interested in where Healy had in mind, and while Healy told him about the boarded up houses or broken tire swings, Gabe chuckled and nodded his head as if saying, Yes Healy, that place is beautiful. I knew it all along. Gabe patted Healy on the back and smiled at Harriet, and it was in these moments that Harriet knew Gabe was thrilled to feel part of this game, honored that Healy thought Timmy’s Last Resort held the same hidden beauty.

“Tonight, it’s a surprise,” Healy responded, glancing over at Harriet.

“I see. Well then you’ll both have to tell me about it next week.” At this, Harriet quickly glanced away. Harriet could feel Healy’s eyes on the top of her head, but she refused to rise from behind her stack of pancakes. Healy let the air hang, the way he does, before he spoke.

“I’ll be here to tell you all about it.”

***

After what must have been another hour, Healy’s Corolla hit gravel. The car slowed, and then pulled over. Harriet slid her legs off the dashboard and peered out the front window. The pancakes made her full and sleepy, so she missed most of the ride. Parked under an overpass, they were hidden in the shadows from the fading light of distant light poles. Healy pocketed the keys and pushed open his door. Harriet followed slowly, stepping out into the cool air and kicking gravel as she
walked. She looked at Healy, hands in his pockets, his breath a visible circle she could catch in her hands. She waited for him to say something. When he didn’t she breathed, “Where are we?”

Healy raised his head and looked around at the gravel road and the grass field beyond the overpass. He shrugged his shoulders, like it was obvious. “Some field.”

“What are we doing here?” Healy pulled out his pack of Camels from his back Levi’s pocket, took one out, and placed it so it hung out the corner of his mouth.

“You’ll see.” Harriet feigned annoyance, crossed her arms across her chest and looked up at the sky. It was that grey color, when the white snow and stars reflect off the black to lighten the shade. Healy lit his cigarette and walked to the back of the car. With force, he pulled open the trunk, his head disappearing from view. There was a rustling, some muffled words, and then Healy walked around to the front of the Corolla carrying multicolored tubes.

“Are those fireworks?”

Healy walked past Harriet towards the field. “Are you just gonna ask questions all night or help me set them up?”

She ran to catch up to him, bumping his shoulder and taking some of the fireworks out of his hand. When they reached the edge where the gravel changed to grass Healy bent down and dumped the fireworks at his feet. Harriet squatted down beside him, watching as the smoke from his cigarette snaked upward. Healy always smelled of sweet smoke and shoe polish. It was the smell that snuck into her clothes and slept next to her after nights like these.

“Don’t you think you should put out your cigarette while setting up the fireworks?” Harriet asked. Healy rolled his eyes and started ripping the wrapper off the tubes, mumbling, “I like to live on the edge.”
Fifteen minutes, three curses and one cigarette later all the fireworks were now standing up in a line, ready to fire. Healy brushed the dust off his black jeans and checked each pocket for his lighter. As Harriet watched Healy she realized this was the last night Healy would be real. After tonight he would be just a memory, a slow voice on the other end of a pay-phone, or a hanging smell. She slipped her hands in her pockets and, because she couldn’t ignore it any longer, broke.
“T’m going to miss this.” Healy paused in his search, and glanced up at Harriet. He seemed to be studying her, letting her words hang. Finally, he looked away, but as he fished into his pockets he responded.

“You won’t be missing anything.”
“I’ll be missing everything.”

Healy sighed, and said in a tired voice, “Harriet.” Harriet knew Healy hated it when she talked about how she didn’t want to leave. He considered it ungrateful; not appreciating what was being offered. For years, Healy had been teaching Harriet about patience, about rushing to nowhere, and now, when Harriet finally had somewhere to go, she couldn’t force her feet to move. She’d lift her foot to take a step, but then she’d picture Healy driving alone at night, or sitting behind a stack of pancakes talking to Gabe, and she’d lower her foot. After all those car rides Harriet now understood; for her it was never about going somewhere so much as it was about going somewhere with Healy.

***

“You ready?” This time Harriet let Healy’s voice hang, welcoming the cool air around the consonants, until there was nothing left to do but make the noises into motions. Harriet nodded.

The fireworks ranged in time, so Healy could light
them all in order from longest to shortest. If timed right, they
would explode one after the other. Healy found his lighter and
placed the glowing flame on the ten fireworks he had assem-
bled. Healy and Harriet sprinted about 50 feet away, the grav-
el crunching under their shoes. As the fireworks crackled in
anticipation, Harriet looked at Healy in the dark. His face was
barely more than a shadow. Healy stepped closer to Harriet. As
blue and red crashed into the sky, Healy leaned to Harriet, and
whispered, “Was it worth the wait?”

Harriet pulled back to look at Healy’s face. Green and
gold fireworks reflected off his cheek. Harriet watched the
fireworks burst off of Healy, tracing each jet trail with her eyes,
slowly, so she didn’t miss a single spark. Healy raised an eye-
brow and leaned even closer to Harriet.

“What if I told you this wasn’t the only surprise?” Har-
riet met Healy’s grin with confusion, but before she could ask
anything, Healy took Harriet’s hand. He peeled back her fingers
in one motion and in her palm dropped the keys to the Corolla.
Harriet stared at the keys in her hand. They looked strange
in her hand compared to Healy’s, yet warmth seeped from the
metal into her skin.

“What?”

“I’m giving you the Corolla.”

“You’re joking”

“Not joking.”

“Healy. It’s your car.”

“It was my car. Now it’s yours.”

“Be serious, Heals. I don’t want these.” Harriet reached
the keys out towards Healy, but he didn’t move his arm.

“Yes, you do. Listen. Uncle Jerry is teaching me how to
build a ’63 Camaro, piece by piece. I’ve been working on it for a
few months now. I’ll finish it, and then that will be my car.”
“You’ll need a car before it’s done.”
“No, I won’t. I’ll walk. Or take the bus. And besides, where will I have to go now that you’ll be gone?” Healy joked, but his words were too honest, so they fell heavy in the empty night. Instead, or maybe because, Healy gently pushed Harriet’s hand holding the keys into her chest. “Take the car, Harriet. It was more yours than mine.”

Harriet looked at Healy. He was barely visible as the fireworks faded. It wasn’t like Healy to push. Leaning against the hood of the Corolla, like they had done countless times before, Harriet thought the car wasn’t so much a gift but a request. Flipping the keys through her fingers Harriet felt her throat burn. Chocking on air, or something deeper, she glanced at Healy’s car, then back at him.

“We’ll visit you.”
“That was the hope.” Healy exhaled, and walked over to the passenger’s door. He stood with hands in his pockets, waiting for Harriet. She had turned her back to him, watching the last gold flame flicker against the sky, burning down, down, down, until finally, it turned to dust. “Come on, Harriet,” Healy called, leaning against the passenger’s door.

Harriet walked towards Healy, rolled her eyes before opening the driver side, and asked, “What’s the rush?” Both Harriet and Healy slid into seats. As Harriet started the engine Healy leaned back and rested his feet against the dashboard. “You’ve got somewhere to go.”
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