

A dark, atmospheric photograph of a night scene. In the foreground, a textured, dark branch with small, intricate details is visible on the right side. The background is filled with soft, out-of-focus teal and blue bokeh lights, creating a dreamy and mysterious atmosphere. A semi-transparent white rectangular box is centered in the middle of the image, containing the text.

*Scarborough  
Fair*



WHAT WILL  
THE DARKEST  
GALAXIES BRING  
TO LIGHT?

UNIVERSITY OF  
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BOUNDLESS

CAN WE MAKE  
OUR CITIES  
ACCESSIBLE FOR  
EVERYONE?

UNIVERSITY OF  
TORONTO

BOUNDLESS







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# Foreword

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Carrienne Leung — Writer in Residence

## Why write?

This seems like the most basic of questions to ask a writer. Why put oneself through hours trying to find the right word, stringing them together to create the right sentence, connecting them in the perfect flow and sequence to craft the right paragraph or stanza? Why, when our bodies are contorted from being in one position for too long, our hair flies wild from fingers tearing at it, our frustration level is driving us to despair because the writing is just not right.... Yet, no one seems to ask writers WHY? Maybe they take one look at us and don't dare.

Despite all of the reasons that make this a questionable practice, there are many reasons we write. We don't speak them out loud much. I wish we did. It's as if writing hangs on a very fine balance and by asking, we risk tipping over. But I love hearing writers explain the why of what they do. I am most intrigued when writers say they write simply because they have to. I belong to this camp. A manic muse haunts me and gives me no choice but to pick up the pen. Write, she says. It's the only way to make sense of anything!

Writers are an interesting bunch. We swim in a sea of language with an obligation to net words together like it's a quest for discovery... or recovery. Writers write because they are so compelled by the world that they must reach for words to make meaning, truth, beauty. They must write humanity to remind others and themselves that we are human. Maybe they write because it makes them feel, makes them laugh, brings them fully into being who they want to be.

The process of writing extends much further than the fevered scribbling in a notepad or a curled body around a keyboard. Writing is also happening when a writer directs an intent gaze upward at a passing cloud, arrested by light and shadow. It can also look like a writer eavesdropping on strangers, picking up the timbre of a voice, idioms and inflections in speech, storing for later while writing dialogue. Sometimes, writers have to make friends with a tree to understand how to describe the particular green of its leaves or the sway of its branches in the wind. Walking is also an important part of it all. Walking can keep a story or line of poetry flowing, worked out by the swing of the arms and the length of the stride. Writers are always steeped in sensory details so they can unleash them later on the page.

I have heard from some writers that they feel most alive while writing. Writers experience some of their best moments alone. They can feel some of their worst moments alone, too. There is a degree of solitude that comes with a life of a writer.

And yet, this strange labour bears such sweet fruit. The poems, fiction and non-fiction work gathered in the 51st issue of Scarborough Fair are the result of this earnest attention and painstaking work, mined from memories, feelings, and a deep immersion in life. This brings us to the answer to another question we don't usually ask: why read? We read to accept this gift: the writer's precious endowment to readers so that they too may see the world anew.

I hope you enjoy this exquisite collection, as I do.



01  

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POETRY

## Back to Genesis

*Grayson Chong*

Your mother lies disfigured and defiled  
By your belligerent fathers. Her womb  
Is a scorched forest. She weeps in tides. Wild  
Tigers send themselves to her hollow tomb.  
The military strategy is clear –  
Kill your daughters. Eat your sons. Self-preserve.  
Roman, you know it's weak to show your tears.  
Stones will cry for the revenge you deserve.  
Rome looks at the chaotic state of her  
Cubs. She has raised black ravens, not fair doves.  
Feed these offending sinners to the curs.  
In this war, the earth is no place for love.  
Barbarian, Mother's gluttonous lust  
Seeks to ravish and grind you back to dust.



## Needle Work

*Neha Mistry*

The thread pulled through an eye,  
A soft warmth, sterilized by your flame,  
Ready to give and receive  
Ready to hear your pain.

The cold metal touches the canvas,  
A thumb smoothing the surface,  
With a breath, you slide the point  
Through the resisting fabric.

The silver sharp, catches the flesh,  
A small nip of love, and  
Red blossoms down the line,  
Marring the purity of your creation.

You chant, the hidden words  
Of your troubles yet unheard,  
The truth woven into the designs  
That line the inside of your thighs.

# The Doppleganger

*Trinidad Lagos*

My name is  
Elle, or  
Light like a  
Burning fire's warmth.  
God, I am  
Probably  
Pride like  
A lion, or greed like  
A frog, or lust like  
A snake, or envy like  
A dog, or gluttony like  
A boar, or wrath like  
A bear, or sloth like  
The deadly sins.  
I am also recognized as Kristen Gilbert, and  
I do what I do to please you.  
God,  
I am sinful, loyal, your servant.  
My lord,  
I am

The Devil,  
actually call me,  
Morning Star.  
I am not  
His Follower,  
just an embodiment of  
Lucifer or  
Mammon or  
Asmodeus or  
Leviathan or  
Beelzebub or  
Satan or  
Belphegor.  
I am sinful,  
An Angel of Death.  
What I do frees myself and others of your light.  
I am full of hate, mischief, and witchery.  
So fear me  
because  
I am

Human.

# From the Faraway, Nearby

*Vishaal Beharry*

Westward trajectory  
Ochre soles and blood blistered  
Flesh forges the path.  
Barefoot on hot clay  
Alone in a barren expanse  
All I need was here.

Stern rigours of drought  
Earth's sacrificial rites fail  
To outlast my pace.

Bone-white Jimson weed  
Wilted where rivers once ran  
Beside the living.

Footsteps in vibrating dust,  
A cowboys death comes at dusk.





02

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FLASH  
FICTION



# Where Uma Went

*Chantelle Cho*

Umma left through the kimchi cellar.

That's what Uncle says to Auntie behind the closed door of their bedroom. I exchange a glance with Minwoo—our ears are lined flush with the wood, mine next to the crack near the knob. We'd fought over that spot. I'd won.

Auntie shares the gossip she's heard around the village, but her voice is so soft I only catch snippets: Single mother. Gone to Seoul, maybe. Left her child.

Shameful.

My fingers curl into fists. I'm no longer listening; I can't bring myself to press my ear back to the door. She *had* to leave, I want to say. But I don't. I just stand there, until Minwoo slips his hand into mine and pulls me back to our room.

\*\*\*

Minwoo kneels on the floor and leans over our thin, beaten mattress. It takes up most of the room; a dresser is squished against the far wall under the windowsill. He rearranges the pillows and blanket and looks up at me from his side near the window.

"You know where Auntie went, don't you?" he finally whispers.

I shake my head, immediately. Repeatedly. I let him pull me down to lie next to him. He pouts, then shuffles closer.

"You can tell me. I won't tell Appa. Promise."

"Fine," I mutter, feigning reluctance. I slowly roll outwards to the mattress' edge, lift the corner and pull out a square book. It's handmade, coloured construction paper bound tight by pieces of straw. The words are Umma's. The pictures mine.

Minwoo knows what it is immediately. He's seen the book before, but has never been allowed to read it. It'd always been our thing—Umma's and mine. We sit upright, wrap ourselves in the covers, hold the pages up to the moonlight. I read the words over

as if for the first time: a tale of Hengbok, a world where all magical creatures live in peaceful harmony. Rich and wonderful goblins, fiery nine-tailed foxes, winged horses too fast to be seen—all and everything imaginable, I whisper, trying to convince Minwoo just how amazing it is. How even a mother would leave her child to go there.

"And that," I say with inflated chest, "is where Umma went."

Minwoo looks up, wide-eyed. Rests the book on the pillow. "How did she get there?"

"Through the kimchi cellar."

"But there's nothing but big pots inside."

"You have to really wish for it."

Minwoo begins to frown. "Why didn't you go with her?"

His questions sting at my chest. I rked, I say, "Umma said I can't, not until I'm older." Then I add, "But when she left through the cellar door, I saw it. Down the stairs. Just like this!" I jab at the open page. Grassy hills with blooming flowers, clear skies, creatures waiting in welcome. Umma is there, now. Happier.

Minwoo slowly moves away; I grasp at his hands, willing him to believe me. The book is jolted by our movement and falls out of sight.

He finally nods. "Show me," he says.

\*\*\*

Little light reaches us. We stand before the kimchi cellar, unable to make the first move. The book is clenched in my hand. I'll show you, I keep saying, I'll show you where Umma went.

I take a deep breath and wish. Wish. Wish.

The light switch flicks up. The door swings wide. We are suddenly bathed in blinding yellow light. My heart wants to run straight ahead and into the space beyond.

We look inside. Tiptoe down the stairs.

The book falls from my loose fingers.

Only rows of earthenware pots, and the sharp scent of kimchi.

# Mickey Michigan

*Noah Faberman*

Dirt. Dirt. Dirt. Four drops. Dirt. The dirt almost tastes better than the water. Mickey Mouse kicks me. "I'm moving." I cough out through a desert dry throat. My collector hangs four drops heavier around my neck as I crawl forward.

There's a Minnie nearby that keeps eyeballing us. I get nervous when Clubhouse members clump together. I saw a goofy walking a Pluto last week, and I swear they had a full jug with them. Disney characters tend to hoard water, which is against the rules. "Keeping those good ol' family values in the good ol' Disney family!"

Like clockwork, or to show the clock in his mask works, the Mickey picks me up by the ears over the sound of a muffled beep. I grimace but don't complain, complaining gets you sent to the racist crows from Dumbo.

Old dirt paths lead us under the Flint Michigan billboard, Mickey pushes me quickly past the underside of the sign, he leads my head in a path of certain smackitude.

I rise on the other side to the sight of the abandoned and stripped factory that used to house the town. They tried to re-open it a few years ago. Maybe use the equipment to mine for any water dumps, nothing was found and they laid everyone off... again.

"You going to the clubhouse after this?" The Minnie rests her hand on Mickey's big white button.

The monster in the Mickey suit lets out a Goofy "gorsh!" instead of the usual "ho-Ho!".

I'm so happy the suits aren't built to wink. The Minnie walks far enough ahead for my ring-leader to gawk comfortably.

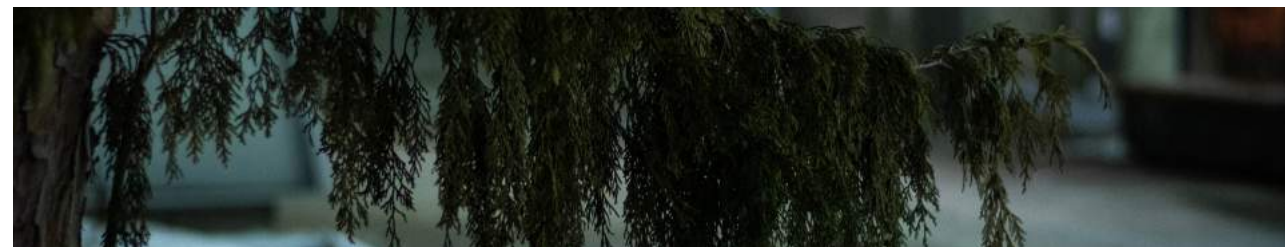
The factory isn't too far, I tell myself, I could make it if I ran, or better yet, I could strike up a deal and just walk there. You two have your fun, if I get caught I'll just say "I

punched the mouse when he went for a drink." Nobody gets in trouble, except me, if I get caught. Which I wouldn't. There's enough tunnels under there, I wouldn't be found. And when I died from dehydration, lack of oxygen, I wouldn't be found.

Tugboat Mickey shoves his gloved palm against my head to stop me. The off-cartoon rodent holds up one finger as he pulls his own little water-flask from an uncomfortable suit pocket.

I still thought they were real the first time I saw one of them drink. Taking off your head while on duty is taboo, so the members of the clubhouse unscrew an eyeball when thirst bleeds through the fabric. That was the big moment for me, when I was seven, watching Donald Duck rip out his own eye and fill the hole with brown water.

I cried then. I try to cry now, ducts empty, even full with thoughts of Duck, empty.





# Cheap Christmas Lights

*Dustin Macandog*

As soon as Mom would arrive home, she'd unhook her bra and throw it across the room. Her aim was impeccable, able to curve the bra so it hung perfectly on the bannister. And she didn't care who was watching. The woman could be walking with damn royalty and still expertly reach back and undo the clips with one foul swoop. It was an insult to feminism – she thought – that women were strangled around their chests.

But she missed the bannister on one grey afternoon. Then missed again. And continued to miss. Until she completely stopped doing it. And then Christmas came.

During that Holiday dinner, Mom was functioning tirelessly, welcoming every soul that entered the house. I watched her move across the room with a tray of appetizers in one hand and a glass of pinot in the other. She liked to nibble on old cheese and chase it with *no-no juice*. The house was booming with a culmination of every piece of Christmas joy I could imagine – the tree coated with ornaments, the vibrant reds and greens of dollar-store lights, the smell of turkey dipped in cranberry sauce, *Rudolph the Red-nosed Reindeer* playing on loop, they were pale in comparison to Mom's expression.

I sat beside her at the dining table. She was discussing something with her friends that I didn't understand at the time. They kept lifting their heads from conversation to make sure none of our male relatives were around. "I can tell you the one thing all men excel at," Mom said, "unbuckling their pants." The women around me laughed. She continued: "Sometimes when I've had enough to drink, a man's belt buckle is like a damn puzzle." She acted it out – wiggling her fingers frantically with one eye shut, bobbing her torso left and right. "But then they go for it, and it's like magic. Those pants are off in a second." The women laugh again, and I laugh too, just to feel included. "If only you can get them to clean a damn a dish that quickly." They nod in agreement and I imitate them. Mom turned to me and pinched my cheeks.

"I know how to undo my belt." I said, proudly.

"That's because you're my little professor."

I followed Mom all night, but when nobody was looking, Aunt Sheila pulled her aside and into the powder room. I couldn't help but stick my ear to the door.

"Are you sure?" Aunt Sheila said.

"Yes. They say it's beginning to shut down," Mom replied.

The words punctured my skin. I suddenly knew the days of carefree immaturity were over – this was the last couple days of exaggerated Christmas decorations, afternoon naps awoken by gourmet dinners, visits from estranged relatives. It was the first night I felt my skin ripping open. I continued to listen:

"Please," Aunt Sheila said, "Please go back to the hospital."

There was a pause. I felt Mom's back lean against the door, defeated. Her exasperated breath. I put my palm on the thin board that separated us, trying to feel her.

"No. I just want this one night. These last days with my family in peace. I don't want them to remember me laying in a hospital bed, or with my head in a toilet. Just these final moments of bliss."

I took my ear off the door and looked at the vibrancy of our home – the smiling faces, the plates full of food, every nook and cranny shimmering with cheap Christmas lights. I should have known why Mom went all-out and invited people I had never seen. One last night of perfection, a final request.

I heard Mom emerge from the powder room, my back was facing her. Tears were pouring down my face, but I didn't want her to see. All I wanted to do was sink into the rolls on her stomach and beg her not to die. Get on my knees and plead – *Please Mom, go back to the hospital.*

She placed her hand on my shoulder. I got the feeling she realized I overheard the conversation.

"My dear, are you okay?"

I quickly rubbed the tears from my eyes and turned to her.

"Yes. Look at my buckle. Look how fast I can undo it."

\*\*\*

*I couldn't fathom a life without her. But now she's gone.*

*And I'm still here.*

# The Search for a Calligraphy Brush

*Helen Jingshu Yao*

It is the 1<sup>st</sup> of July—Canada Day.

She's broken her calligraphy brush, the one she brought over ten thousand kilometers from China.

She knows she has nobody else to blame but herself. There are only a few shops open on this specific day, and they are unlikely to open tomorrow. Even if there is any store in business, she wonders, how can she get the calligraphy brush she needs? New to Canada, she has very few experiences of navigating this place.

She first tries to google: where can I buy a calligraphy brush. The online shopping sites pop up one by one—Amazon, Walmart, eBay. The price varies from \$0.99 to \$100, which makes her puzzled, what would be the fair price to purchase calligraphy brush in Canada? She looks through the photos, zooming in on the details. But the calligraphy brushes are just like shoes; you have no idea if it'll be comfortable to use unless you have a try. She opens several pages and finds that the expected delivery time is usually over 10 days. Taobao in China is much quicker.

Then she looks up art supplies on Google Maps. Different shops' locations jump out. She finds a big chain called Michael's; the nearest one is eight kilometres away. 30 minutes by bus, that isn't too bad. But when she clicks on that branch's page, it shows a big closed sign for the holiday.

Closing up the windows, she sighs. Does she really need the brush so much?

She began to practice calligraphy only because it is her father's hobby, and her mother made her follow. Calligraphy is not that international. It doesn't have much universal value like some musical instruments or sports do. For people who have no knowledge in calligraphy, you can literally draw some nonsense and tell them it's the work of a master and they will totally buy it. Of course, once it becomes a habit, it's a good way to relax when life is too busy. It keeps her busy when there is nothing better to do. But she never thought it was

that important.

Now she's broken her brush. The fact suddenly sounds horrifying. She feels an urgent need to get a new one, without knowing where or how.

She vaguely remembers that there is a Chinese supermarket within walking distance. They basically only sell daily necessities and the price is slightly higher than those at Walmart. But if there is any shop that will be open on Canada Day and sells calligraphy brushes, it must be the one. In order to make sure, she calls the store over the phone.

Though she tries her best to actively participate in class, the daily communication still makes her nervous. The feeling grows when she hears the voice that answers the phone. The man has an accent; his voice, along with the background noise of customers shopping in the store, flows through the line. She manages to understand that the shop is open during regular hours today. But the question about the calligraphy brush is stuck in her throat. It is a strange question to ask even without the language barrier.

"Thank you," she says.

"You are welcome." He hangs up. The only thing she hears is the beeping sound that indicates the call is over.

She looks outside the window. The brightness of midday sunlight makes her eyes narrow. The temperature is around 35 degrees out there and even the clouds can't cover the shine of the sun. She has no access to cars and a taxi ride is way too expensive. The only way to go there is on foot. She pauses for a while. Heat is not something she's afraid of; her hometown back in China is in the south of the country, which makes her used to the flame of summer. What worries her is the long walk through the unfamiliar area for a small chance of getting what she wants.

The brush, a gift from her father when she began her study away from home, is smaller in size and lighter in weight than most calligraphy brushes, which makes it portable for traveling. The hair at the top is a mixture of wolves' hair and wool. Wolves' hair is too hard and wool is too soft, but together, they make the perfect calligraphy brush. It always writes smoothly, though the top is a little worn out and split due to the frequent use. But she still likes it better than the other brushes she has used before, probably because it always accompa-



nies her. Ever since traveling became a big part of her life, she seldom keeps something for a long time. But the calligraphy brush has followed her to different cities in China as well as other parts of the world. Now, what's left there is just a single stick and some separated hairs.

She needs to search for a new brush.

Quickly putting on sunscreen, a hat, and sunglasses, she steps out from the cool dorm into the heat of the summer noon.

The road is almost empty. She doesn't know if it is because of the weather or the holiday. It seems most people have headed downtown to join the celebrations instead of remaining in the remote suburb where nothing exciting ever happens. The path leading to the supermarket goes side by side with a driveway, followed by an overpass above the highway that goes across the western part of the city. The whole construction is made of steel and concrete, which leaves no space for plants to expand their shade.

The heat begins to show its power, which makes her a little dizzy; under the T-shirt, she can feel the sweat squeezing its way out of her skin. The sunlight makes everything brighter. The sky seems remote and the path ahead of her endless. She walks past two blocks without seeing another person, only cars rushing by. Born in a big city in China, she is used to seeing people everywhere, crowded and busy. She feels like the only living being among the huge space between the sky and earth. This sense of loneliness has always been with her and becomes stronger as her age grows. She's never really worried by it because she believes there is no thorough understanding between people; everyone is born lonely. She even felt lonely on the most crowded street of her hometown. But the loneliness made her calm and more certain of who she was at that time, while the loneliness now somehow makes her panic.

She recalls the feeling of practicing calligraphy. Taoism has many theories about calm and balance that she longs for but can never comprehend. She practices *Xiaokai* among the different genres of calligraphy characters, in which the characters are smaller than other genres. With the same kind of brush, *Xiaokai* needs more effort of the writers to control their strength. They need to write with the very tip-top of the brush hair in order to make the characters small and clear. Master calligraphers have hands as steady as surgeons. She likes

the feeling of concentration. Human minds are meant to wander like a leaf flows on a creek, but whether it's anxiety for the coming midterm or the voice of the roommate next door calling her boyfriend, few things can disturb her while practicing calligraphy.

Her feet take her to the entrance of the overpass, where there is a down slip and cars go extra fast. They roar around her, flashing past her like waves, reminding her of watching the tides rise by the sea. Water flows, crashes onto the beach and vanishes, leaving no clue of its existence like most people who live and die. The steady air moves a bit with the quick-passing vehicles. But even the wind is hot and sticky. The sweat covers her skin like a wet shell that separates her from everything else.

She moves toward the middle of the overpass, glancing over the highway from above. She is a little shocked, heart beating faster. Breathing heavily in the humid air feels like taking in thick porridge. Waves of cars and trucks flow right toward her, leaving the noise behind; it feels like looking down at a waterfall from a steep cliff or a rough river from the top of a valley. It would make a perfect video, she thinks, but she just doesn't want to spend more time in the place with no shade.

Now she can see the sign of the supermarket far away. It makes her more optimistic about the endless walking, but doubt rises as well. There is the possibility that she's walked all the way here for nothing; the closer she is to the destination, the closer she is to disappointment. A woman with three huge shopping bags comes from the opposite direction. She feels a sense of affinity toward the stranger, like recognizing another fish that lives on the land. But they pass each other without saying a word.

The supermarket sells calligraphy ink, but no brushes. This makes no sense, yet it happens. She looks through the items, section by section, shelf by shelf. Supermarkets always confuse her. There are just too many options and it takes time to try to understand the information on the labels. How come they offer 30 different kinds of cereals and have 15 different brands for toilet paper but not a single calligraphy brush? She moves the items on the front and reaches to feel the inner part of the shelf. But nothing is found.

She stands there for a while, wondering what to do next. On the way here, she had a clear purpose to find a calligraphy brush. But now the end goal has been lost. Walking

up and down beside the shelf, she unnecessarily glances to where the kitchen supplies are placed. She starts to comprehend the fact that she won't be able to get a new brush today, tomorrow, or even for weeks.

There is no need to stay in the supermarket any longer, even for the coolness of the air-conditioner. Having too many customers here makes this place even more uncomfortable than the streets.

She steps out of the store and the heat embraces her again; this time, it is even stuffier. Her feeling is in some way similar to the weather—unclear, at a loss. There is something unsteady there, waiting to break out.

Then she discovers it, the thick, dark clouds approaching from the West. The sticky wind and the seagulls that fly comparatively low carry the message of the incoming storm. She opens her phone and finds the prediction of a 60% possibility of thunderstorm at 2pm. She looks at the time, 1:50.

The sky somehow gets lower. It seems not only the rain but the whole sky is coming down. The sunlight is still out there, but a little reluctant; its flame, like a false cover of its cowardice, shies back in the face of real power. Then what is it that makes people who afraid of its heat? The coward scared by another coward?

She starts the way back to the dorm, a mixture of fright and excitement rising inside her. She always has a dream of walking calmly in the showering rain, letting the water run down her body without any cover. But she always has something to worry about—her bag and books, her newly washed hair, a pair of nice shoes—and it was always easy to get a taxi ride or call someone to pick her up back in China. However, this time, everything is different. It seems to offer her the chance to put this long-time deep-burden craziness into action.

She walks at the usual pace, trying not to turn back to look at the flowing clouds. But she can feel that everything nearby has darkened, and every blow of the wind becomes cooler. Lightning illuminates the grey world, and thunder comes down like the first strike on the thick ice of a winter pond. She raises her head, staring at the weakened sunlight that she dared not to look at an hour ago.

Finally, the first drop of rain hits her hand, then her face, her hair, and then strong rain pours

on her. Her T-shirt, already dampened by sweat, is now completely wet and sticks to her skin. The water flows from the top of her head and becomes separated streams running along her hair. It flows down her body and joins the rainwater on the ground.

She feels joy, which comes out of nowhere, but also has thousands of reasons.

She runs; her shoes splash water that pours on her leg.

She laughs; there is no one nearby, so she laughs wildly until the thunder covers her voice.







UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO

BOUNDLESS

# 03

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## FICTION

# Self Storage

*Cassandra Macdonald*

Peering left and right down the rows of public storage lockers, I make sure no one is looking. The sun is still out, and it's prime time for me to get caught. Nonetheless, the coast is clear. I put the key in the lock on the door, lift it up just high enough for me to tuck under, and slip inside, pulling it down behind me, pushing the latch in place from the inside. A year back, this location had a case where a starved, gagged body was found in one of the lockers, and ever since, they've all been equipped with internal latch mechanisms.

Inside, I have a mattress, a writing desk with a lamp and a CRT monitor, an unpowered standing water cooler, and a small gas stove. It's still full light out, far too early to risk taking it outside and cooking with it. So instead, I drop my backpack on the mattress and pull out a pack of instant ramen, crack it up, open the top, pour in the flavour packet, and start eating the dry noodles. It's far from gourmet, but such a sacrifice is well worth it--where else in Toronto can you stay at 50 bucks a month for rent? I sit down at my writing desk and pull a bulky grey laptop out of my backpack, setting it down on the desk and starting it up. The default Windows XP desktop shows comes up on screen, and I open Internet Explorer to let that load up as I pull a battery-powered 4G modem from my backpack. Relying solely on a data plan is a costly solution, but as long as I only use it occasionally, it's still a better deal than studio apartment with roommates. As I flick the switch to start it, however, the battery light flashes red. I shake it, as if the battery just needs some encouragement, but to no avail. I could've sworn I charged it on campus. Was it a bad outlet? Couldn't be, I charged my laptop at the same spot. I shake my head. No time to think about that now. I know where there's a rarely-used outlet, but it's still not dark out, it would be risky. I check the time on the monitor. 6:18. I need to get online for 7, when my group is meeting to discuss the presentation tomorrow. It'll need time to charge. I can't put this off, I think, picking up my scarf off the chair, and putting the modem into my purse.

Listening at the door, I undo the latch slowly, and lift the door up just a crack, peering

out for shadows, or the sound of footsteps. Seems clear, I think, lifting it the rest of the way to shuffle out, dropping it behind me as I do. I make my way toward the rarely-used corner of the storage yard. This had been the area where the body was found, so all it took was a couple of compounds smuggled from chemistry, mixed and poured in the area to make a persistent smell of decay, and when rumours spread, management stopped renting them out. As a result, this inlet is rarely visited, and there just so happens to be an open outlet on the side of one of the buildings, sitting right against the small border of grass inside the fence, generally only used when the company has to bring in a vacuum to clean out vacant lockers. Covering my nose with my scarf, I approach and pull the modem out of my satchel, undoing the cord and plugging it in. This time, I watch the battery light to make absolutely certain it's charging, set it down on the grass, then pile some fallen leaves over it before stepping away. As I reach the corner, I nearly bump into someone a full head taller than me coming around the other way.

"Oh, sorry about that," I say, pushing my scarf back up over my nose.

"Not a problem." She waves me off. "You smell it too, though, right?"

"Ohh, yea, it's been here a while." I chuckle. "Don't know what it is."

"Mhmm, I wanted to take a look around, see if I could—"

"You shouldn't!" I say, a lot louder than intended. "I mean, you shouldn't."

"What?"

"There's, raccoons back here, a lot of them. A whole nest of them. I scared them off, but I don't know when they'll be back!" I say, shuffling forward to try and get her to back up around the corner. Still, she tries to look over my shoulder, and with her height, it's not hard.

"Raccoons? They shouldn't be here."

"You're right! They really shouldn't."

"I'll have to go let management know." She turns away, taking a few steps.

"You really don't have to, actually, because, they, actually, already know, and it's just, a whole thing, they're gonna deal with it, but they haven't yet, so every now and then I just come by and shoo them off."

"Well, aren't you the concerned citizen, but you can't be here all the time, surely?"

"N-no, I come by a lot though, I keep a lot of my...uhhh...sporting gear in my locker,

and, I play a lot of sports, so, I'm here a lot, and I'm sure it's fine." The woman raises her brow to me. "Don't worry, it's fine."

"Alright...if you...say so, then." She shrugs and walks away. Close call, I think. I'll have to be careful, in case she does report any of this to management. I remain near my modem while I wait for it to charge, keeping watch for anyone who might come by in uniform. However, half an hour passes, my modem looks just about charged enough, and I stuff it back into my purse. Looking around, I hustle back to my locker.

When I reach the locker, I spot a paper taped to the door, and my blood goes cold. Someone knows. Someone important, too, by the looks of it. Getting closer, I see it doesn't look like a notice. It just looks like a handwritten note, held on with scotch tape. Why would a manager write something up like this?

*"You are hereby ordered to appear for trial at Unit 119 on this, the eighth of November, at 19:00, for the crime of reckless exposure.*

*Signed,*

*CL"*

I scratch my head. This doesn't mean anything, right? It's all total nonsense. I crumple up the notice and cram it in my pocket as I pull out my keys and slip back into my locker with fifteen minutes to spare to get on for the group project as I slowly lower the garage door of the locker to the ground.

Unsurprisingly, for all my work in being on time, we end up waiting half an hour for a group member who won't respond, leaving me fuming at my desk as I idly message back and forth in the group chat. It's a huge waste of my precious data, and my laptop's battery life, but I have to stay in chat in case they arrive. At this moment, I hear footsteps outside my door, and I stop, remaining perfectly still, fearful for even the smallest creak of my wooden chair. I wait, hearing nothing, and wondering if it was just nerves, when suddenly, I hear the turning of the lock on my door, and freeze up. My eyes dart around the room, looking for somewhere I could hide, but my body doesn't respond, and I just sit perfectly still, as if their vision were based on movement. A flashlight beam shines in my eye and snaps me out of my daze. I get to my feet as the door is pulled down behind me, and the flashlight is turned off, leaving only my desk lamp providing a dingy incandescent orange light to the room. No

longer blinded, I get a look at two figures who have entered, who are pulling back hoodies to reveal their faces. One is the tall woman I recognized from before, while the other is a shorter man I've never seen.

"Being late for a trial does not reflect well," the short man says.

"Who are you?" I say, taking a few steps back until my heels are up against the box spring under my mattress.

"I am Nara, of the Council of Locks," the tall woman says, and in the dim light of the locker, I see a key dangled around her neck like jewellery. "You have endangered us all, and if you wish to speak in your defense, you must be brought to trial. Come."

"I kind of have an urgent appointment, actually, can't really miss it," I say, gesturing to my computer.

"You will come. Now." She declares, and I find my shaking hands unconsciously picking up my sweater off the back of my chair and putting it on.

I am lead several aisles down to the other side of the storage facility, flanked by Nara and the short man. The two of them seem confident in the routes they're taking, but my knees are shaking, and when I see the beam of a flashlight cross in front of us, my instinct is to run. As the figure rounds the corner, the flashlight blinds me, and my feet shuffle away, preparing to run. I expect the others to react the same, but instead, Nara grabs my arm tight while her other hand pulls the string with the key off her neck, over her head, and holds it out. As the flashlight turns off, I recognize the uniform of a security guard through my speckled vision.

"Thanks, Dodger," Nara says as the guard takes the key.

"Any time," he says, in whispered tones. "I bought you an hour before Rani gets back to this route, but be quiet in case someone else comes by."

"We will be. Won't we?" She says, looking to me. I swallow hard, nod, and without thinking about it, give a two-fingered salute. The short man stifles a laugh from under his hood, but before I can embarrass myself further, Nara pulls me forward before letting go. We get to a locker door, she knocks three times in steady rhythm, and the door lifts up from inside. It's pitch-black beyond the short reach of moonlight into the room, but as I'm ushered in and the door is shut behind me, several small lamps come on, revealing a small dining room table, at which five figures are seated, tightly crammed together. Nara and the short man take



seats along the sides, and as she does, Nara gestures to the seat at the foot of the table.

"Can we make this fast, Lex?" She says to the figure at the head of the table as I sit down. "It's an open-and-shut case, just exile the kid so we can all go back to our units."

"Exile?" I say, my eyes widening. "What do you mean exile?"

"It's when you get kicked out of a place and aren't allowed back," Nara says, rolling her eyes.

"Enough," the figure at the far end of the table says. As my eyes finally adjust to the lighting, I get a good look at them. They're androgynous in appearance, and their voice is no less so.

"You're not in charge of this place, what right do you have to throw me out?"

"There will be severe consequences to staying in this place," they say.

"Consequences? What are you talking about?" I say, leaning forward with my hands on the table.

"Do you remember the story of the body found in unit 227?" they say. I stop, and it takes me a moment to grasp the implication. My knees shudder, and I quiet down for fear that my voice may crack if I try to say anymore. "You are brought here before the Council of Locks on charges of reckless endangerment of our way of life. How do you plead?"

"Not guilty," I say, looking around the table. The other folk have not let down their hoods yet, and the whole room, between the candle-like incandescent lights on the table and the black hoods, feels like some kind of old-timey tribunal.

"You were seen moving about recklessly during the day by Nara. This, alone, is evidence enough for your exile," Lex says, looking to Nara.

"How was I supposed to know there were more of you living here?" I say, shuffling back into my chair like a frightened child. I can feel sweat beading under my hairline.

"Exactly. See, us in the Council of Locks, we don't get seen," Nara says. "which is why you're such a pain. You're so damned obvious."

"I promise, I'll do better in future," I plead. "I'm not gonna go out during the day again, I won't endanger anyone, I swear." Lex only shakes their head.

"You were right, Nara. Open-and-shut indeed." They jot some notes in a small book laid open before them. "Apologies for wasting all of your time. Exile is the sentence. Are any

of those in present company prepared to vouch otherwise?" I look around the table as the blood drains from my face. The hooded figures look over to each other, but none of them speak or make any further movements. "Then the sentence is--"

"Oh you look so bloody pathetic, don't you?" Nara says, cutting off Lex. "Come on, I'll vouch for you if you just stop grovelling." I nod enthusiastically, trying to straighten up my expression and get my chin up.

"You vouch then, Nara?" Lex asks.

"Sure, why not?"

"Then you can walk the acquitted back to Unit 201." Nara nods and stands up out of her chair, tapping my shoulder as she walks by me to the door.

"Come on, get up," she says, and I snap up out of my chair, nervously bumping the long table as I do. Undoing the locker door, Nara peeks outside, then slips out, and I follow, letting down the door behind me. As it falls shut, I hear laughter from within. Are they laughing...at me? I turn to Nara, looking for any sort of explanation, and see her, also, snorting with laughter.

"What's funny?" I ask.

"You bought it all, huh?" She whispers through chuckling breaths. "Look on your face was too real. 'Council of Locks'? God I can't believe that dumb schtick works every time."

"I'm...sorry?"

"Come on, let's get back to your unit, I'll explain once we're inside." She guides me back through the winding aisles of lockers, walking confidently, as if she knows every guard patrol by heart. When we get back, I unlock it and step inside, and she follows me in, closing the door behind her.

"You're not getting exiled, kid," Nara says. "And we didn't kill anyone, neither. The dead guy owed money to some mob guy or something. Lex is just a drama student. They like to put on a whole lot of theatrics to scare the new folk into being more careful. We all went through it."

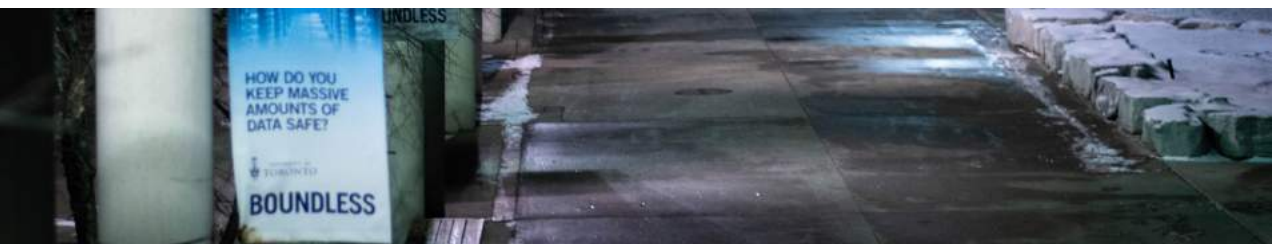
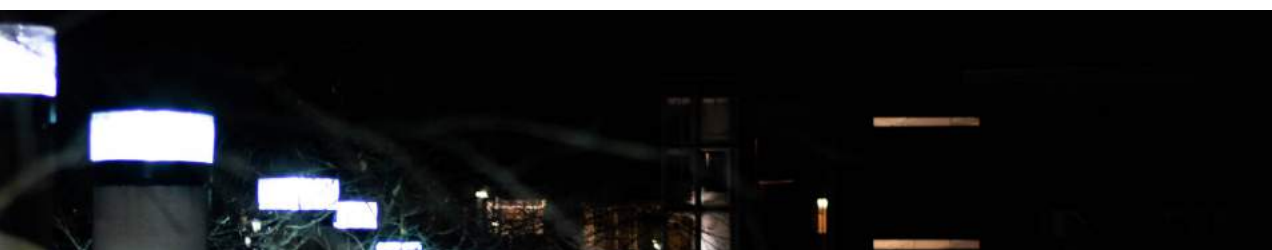
"Wait, really?" I ask. Nara nods.

"You handled pretty well, actually. The guy two seats down from me actually pissed himself when Lex threatened him." Nara snorts and chuckles again. "Welcome to the club. Be

more careful in future." She pats me on the shoulder, and with my weak knees, I almost fall over.

"Thanks...will do," I stutter out as she turns back to open the locker. Once her footsteps are silent, I turn to my desk, pulling out the chair, and as I do, my screen dims, then darkens as the battery dies.

"Fuck." I whisper, looking to the latch on the door of my locker.



## Sonata

*Erin Somerville*

I brushed the hair away from her face and leaned down to kiss her cheek. I took her hand and held it tightly, sitting on the edge of her bed. Someone knocked on the door but I ignored it. I just sat with her, holding her hand.

I had been invited over to the neighbours. We were getting everything ready to go to the beach. Andrew's mom was lathering sunscreen over his back and face. "Mom," he said pushing her hand away from his nose. "Mom stop. I'm twelve years old! I don't need you to do this anymore." I looked back and our eyes met for a moment. He cringed a smile. "Mom." He strained a whisper to her. She rolled her eyes and walked away after placing the bottle in Andrew's hand.

Andrew's younger sister was waiting on the couch in the living room. I peeked around the corner to look at her. She was sitting in her bathing suit and her legs crossed, guitar in her lap. It was positioned up right with the pegs lightly pressed against her cheek. Her fingers strummed randomly back and forth. She turned her head and I ducked behind the corner. The strumming stopped for a moment. I slowly looked around again.

She was staring down at the guitars head when suddenly, she bit it. She strummed the guitar again with the head in her mouth. Her eyes closed.

"What are you doing?"

She jumped putting the guitar on the couch beside her. I stepped into the room and looked at her. She giggled.

"What?"

"Why would you bite your guitar? Like, what were you doing?"

Her cheeks began to redden. "Hmm? Oh, well it feels funny."

I stared at her and then the guitar. "You're a bit weird."

She picked up her guitar again and wiped the head with her towel. "At least I'm not

boring.”

“What?” I walked over to her and stood with my chest puffed out. “I’m not boring!”

The corner of her lip twitched. “I didn’t say you were boring. I just said that I’m not.” She uncrossed her legs and placed her guitar over her lap. She strummed again pressing down in search of the right note.

“Do you even know how to play that?”

“Not yet.”

“Oh...” I sat down beside her and watched as she began to piece out something that slowly sound like music. She looked over at me from the corner of her eyes. A smile played across her lips as she passed her guitar over to me.

“Why don’t you try?”

“Play it? I don’t know how. My mom says I’m tone deaf. You know like I can’t hear the notes or something like that.”

“Then bite it.”

I leaned away. I stuck my tongue out and pushed the guitar back onto her lap. “Ew! I’m not biting that! You just had it in your mouth!”

She rolled her eyes. “I wiped it off! C’mon. Just bite it. It feels cool trust me.” She giggled. Her hair dropped from behind her ear as she passed her guitar to me once more, but she quickly brushed it back again. I stared at her, then down at her guitar in my lap. I pulled it up to my mouth and stopped. I gave a small sigh with my eyes turned up to the ceiling and bit down. I pulled on a single string. The buzz rose up the neck of the guitar and into my head. When I looked around, the world was vibrating. I pulled it again. The string sounded louder in my head, it *felt* louder.

“What are you doing?” Andrew burst out into laughter. I thrust the guitar back into her hands and jumped away. Their mom walked into the room.

“What are we laughing at?”

“Nothing!” I hugged my towel against my chest and walked passed her to the door.

“Anne honey. Put your guitar away we need to get going.”

I opened the door to our room and walked inside. Anne was asleep in bed. The

covers were tucked under her feet, just the way she liked. I sat down beside her and took her hand in mine.

“Anne? Anne Honey?”

Her eyes opened.

“Good morning sunshine.” I feigned a smile. “I found your iPod. It was in the couch. You know how things get stuck between the cushions.” I laughed for her but it faded away to silence. “You know I was thinking.” Her eyes followed my lips but she couldn’t speak. “You always get me to do the weirdest things. Or you make weird things feel normal or something...I’d be so boring without you.”

My parents had decided it was time to move again. By the time middle school came to an end I found myself saying goodbye to my best friend Andrew and his little sister Anne. We hugged as the last things were packed into the moving truck. Anne had just stood staring at me. Her usual smile was lost from her lips. It wasn’t until university when we saw each other again.

I was walking down one of the halls trying to find the right room. Most of the benches were packed as people waited for one class to end and theirs to begin. One girl was sitting on the floor with a pair of bulky head phones on. Her eyes were closed and her head laid back against the wall. A single red curl dangled in front of her face.

“Anne?”

She didn’t open her eyes. Her head was rolling back and forth against the wall and her fingers were tapping against the floor. I called her name again before resorting to a light tap on the shoulder. Her eyes opened slightly. Her brows furrowed as she pulled her headphones off of one ear.

“Yes?”

“Anne? You don’t recognise me? Matt? We used to be neighbors?”

She starred at me for a moment before her smile came through. “Oh my god Matt? What are you doing here?” I put my hand out and pulled her up while she put her iPod away.

“I go to school here. My family moved close by actually. What are you doing here? You go here too?”



"Yeah! I just started my first year. I got into the music program and Andrew actually moved just down the road a year ago."

"Oh wow! That's great. I'm a bit farther away than that but it's just a quick bus ride. Is this your first class?" I pointed over to the room where students were starting to file in.

"Hmm?" She looked over. "Oh no. I had my first class earlier this morning. I have a couple hours to myself right now. How about you? Do you have class?"

"Me? Uhh, no. Nothing important. Have you had lunch?"

We walked around campus for a while before grabbing something to eat at the pub nearby. We caught up on all we missed like what instruments she learned to play. She had auditioned with her cello but played a range of different instruments, the piano, euphonium, trumpet and guitar of course. At one point she spilled her drink and the waitress had to bring her a new one.

"So, what were you listening to when I found you?"

She pulled out her iPod and passed it over. "It's Brahms Cello Sonata in E minor."

I put the headphones on and pressed play. "A what a-what now?"

"Just listen." She smiled at me, watching for my reaction as a cello and piano began playing. She described it to me as it played. As she would say crescendo the music grew louder and when she said pianissimo, the music became soft. She tucked her hair behind her ears and waited for my response. She was leaned against the table watching. All I could do was stare back. I took the headphones off after a few minutes and handed them back.

"Very...classical."

She giggled. "Yes, well it is considered classical music. Not your cup of tea?"

"Not really no. But it was nice."

She shrugged. "That's okay. It's not for everyone."

"I don't even know what a Sonata is. Like, what is it?"

She took a moment, still smiling at me. "A Sonata is like a solo. It's a solo but it usually has some accompaniment. You know, like in this how the cello was playing a solo but the piano was there with it. Accompanying it. Something like that."

"Just along for the ride eh. The piano?"

"Sort of" She took a sip from her drink. "You know Andrew would probably love to

hear from you. I can give you his home phone number if you want?"

I could feel Anne's hand try to squeeze mine. I looked at her again. "You know it's funny. You made it seem like I only ever wanted to hang out with Andrew. But, I'm starting to think the only reason I ever came over was to see you. Even when we were young. You did all these funny things and I just wanted to know what you were doing."

I smoothed out the crinkles in the comforter. She was still watching me. Following my lips as I spoke. Watching my eyes, my face, she wanted to know my reactions.

"You know I love you."

"He's working a bit later than he thought." Anne gestured for me to come inside. "But he said you can wait for him here if you want."

I followed her down stairs to the living room. There was a piano in the corner and her cello stood on a stand nearby.

"Are you going to play for me?"

We were sitting on the couch. "If you want I can." She walked over to the piano and sat down. Her foot pressed against the back board, above the piano pedals. She played a quick scale before starting into a song. One of her feet stayed pressed against the back board until it was needed. She would gently press down on the pedals and as soon as it wasn't needed, her foot would go to the back board again.

"Why do you do that?"

She looked down at her feet with a shrug. "I like the way it feels." She tucked the bench away and walked back to the couch. She stumbled slightly before sitting down. "Music is all about how it feels you know? Sound is nothing but good vibrations."

"Okay?" I laughed at her a little. "You seem to love it."

"I do! I feel like I'd die if I couldn't play." She giggled a bit before grabbing my arm. "Here I'll show you." She pulled me over to her cello and adjusted the height. She touched the head. "This windy part here? It's called the scroll. If you put your head just under it." She placed her forehead under the scroll against the head of her cello. "It feels like your head fits just perfect."

I gave her an odd look before she handed it to me. She pointed for me to place my head. I watched her as she pulled her bow across the strings and white dust puffed into the air. My head buzzed as the noise reached me. When I looked around my eyes were unable

to focus as the noise vibrated the world.

"Feel it? It's just vibrations!" She laughed. I pulled my head away and let her take the cello. She smiled at me for a moment staying silent. "I think I've shown you enough of my music, why don't you show me yours?"

I put my hands up. "Oh no, I don't play anything."

"That's okay! Andrew bought amazing speakers. You can just hook your phone up or something. Play something from YouTube if you want?" She took my hand and led me over to the speakers.

"Surprise me. I'll wait over here." She stepped back and waited while I looked something up. She took a seat on one of the speakers. Rush came through the speakers. "Turn it up!"

"You sure?"

"Turn it up!"

She held onto the speaker as she sat on the corner. Her head tilted back and her mouth opened slightly. I watched her as I slowly turned the music up louder and louder. She looked over it me and mouthed the words, "come here."

Anne and I spent as much time together as we possibly could. When I graduated and found a job, Anne eventually moved in with me. She was in her last year of university. Nothing really seemed obvious enough. A few clumsy acts here and there.

She sat up on stage with her cello in between her legs. She was playing a Sonata for an audience. She rolled with the rhythm, hugging her cello as she and it swayed back and forth with the movement of her bow. Her bow slipped from her fingers and hit the ground. It squealed across the strings as it fell. She looked at me in the crowd not moving. The piano kept playing in the background. She picked up her bow again and found her place. They continued again without further disruption.

But when it was over, she looked at me with her brows furrowed. Her hair had fallen in front of her face but she didn't bother to push it back.

"Somethings wrong Matt."

The following months were spent in and out of hospitals with test after test. Trial

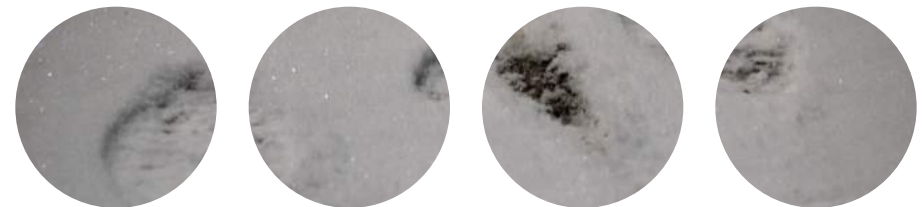
medications and physical therapy. Her cello bow became heavy in her hands and eventually she couldn't control her fingers well enough to hold it.

ALS stands for Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis. It started with small things. Her clumsiness or muscle cramps but eventually it became too severe. It was difficult to speak or breath and she couldn't walk anymore. Most days were spent in bed while I talked to her. It felt sudden.

"You know I love you. I've always felt like I'm just along for the ride with you. Always showing me new things or asking me to do something, anyone else in the world would think is crazy. But you made it seem normal."

I put the headphones over her ears and scrolled through the songs list on her iPod until I found Brahms Cello Sonata. Her eyes were reddening and tears had begun falling down her cheeks. Her hand twitched but she didn't try to speak.

She closed her eyes sending the last few tears running down. I switched off the machine keeping her lungs moving and waited. Her body shook slightly in a last spasm attempt to live, but then faded into a calm. She lay peacefully without pain. I brushed the hair away from her face and leaned down to kiss her cheek. I took her hand and held it tightly, sitting on the edge of her bed. Someone knocked on the door but I ignored it. I just sat with her, holding her hand.



# Family Vibe

## *Andrew Throuvalas*

He would roll himself out of bed on a brisk Tuesday morning, shovel down half a bowl of oatmeal, boil a couple of eggs, and be out the door quarter past three. Mr. Rockwood quit handing him the breakfasts by the time he was nine; the free rides by ten- each time without warning or acknowledgement.

"They were lessons." Jason tells me. "That's how he would speak to me. That one was one-part independence, and two parts discipline. And it's how I first learned to both make food and take the bus route". I could see Mr. Rockwood doing something like that, but I could also see him forgetting to wake up one morning and being relieved to find out Jason could improvise through his own dreadfully mornings from then onwards.

Jason's discipline astounded me. Besides Tuesday mornings, he'd have an additional swim practice after school at 4 o'clock, another practice on the following morning, a dry land practice on Wednesday afternoon, two more in the pool on Thursday, another on Friday morning, and an extra long practice on Saturday- all while swapping between swim centres. Before being back at it again on early Monday morning, he'd have Sunday off- if there wasn't a swim meet taking place, that is, in which case would usually last the whole day. I've said before that you couldn't get me up that early every morning to play video games- never mind train.

"Even then, I probably wouldn't have made it past the oatmeal" I said. "That shit was gross as a kid".

"Nah man, the oatmeal's a treat. You should've seen what my buddy would bring in." Apparently, you could find Corrie in the change room before every practice chugging a 'uniquely modified' energy drink - a recipe he and his dad had jointly devised. Those two called it "Level-up Juice", but the rest of the guys took to calling it "The Concoction" or later "Shit Stew". That was because when he started adding a tablespoon of peanut butter to the existing blend of Greek yogurt, milk, green beans, and chocolate protein powder, it didn't

only look like manure, but smelt like it too. The first time he drank it, the whole team stayed in the changeroom five minutes into practice just to watch him choke it down.

"Then the coach said 'I'd give you shit for delaying practice, but I guess you did it to yourself already'. So that's when we started calling it that". Jason was laughing over it, like it was way funnier than it should've been. "Man, coach was hilarious! For all the kicks in the ass he really made us laugh."

Stuff like that didn't normally fly with the coach, and that was a collective understanding. Every body was to be out on the pool deck fifteen minutes before practice began, at 4am. The early hours were no excuse. Tardiness was frowned upon, absence was scorned, attitude was sin, and lethargy- that was just banishment. By those rules, the club had done a good job in the past year at weeding out the undedicated swimmers by the time the boys were eleven. Some were kicked out, but most just cracked under the pressure and exhaustion. Jason called this process "Fraudulence Screening".

"Honestly, it was way better when that happened. We figured if those rules weren't their way of life already, then we didn't need to hear them bitch and moan."

In return for its members' absolute cooperation, the Oshawa club's coaching was just as dedicated to its' swimmers in return. Mentorship was both highly technical and highly personalized for every one of the few, elite remaining members of the age group. Of Jason's friends, there were five:

First there was Corrie, the one with the drink. As stupid and untalented as he was, his raw effort and willingness to put himself through hell allowed him to keep up with the rest- at least at first. His specialty was the breast-stroke.

Then there were the Thompson twins, Jonah and Malachi. They were best friends and bitter rivals in the one-hundred metre back-stroke, desperate to get faster enough than the other so that people could tell them apart.

James was Jason's closest friend, and at first, the strongest swimmer in the club and a jack of all trades at that. He rarely won the top spot, but would frequently place for a medal at swim meets in various events.

As for himself, Jason specialized in the fly. He showed the fastest improvement amo-



ngst the group, and both coaches and parents took a special liking to him. The other swimmers found him mysterious and couldn't tell whether he was a 'talkative teammate' or a 'lone-wolf'. Nevertheless, they later turned to following his example during practice.

"I was all ears off the deck, but once practice started, I was in my own world" says Jason. "If they thought I was a badass for that, then they knew what was up."

"Different talents, different personalities, one team...you guys sound like you're straight out of a comic book."

"I know, right? We were a squad! Corrie was the brawn, I was the brain, James-"

"The brain?"

"Yeah, for sure! I had all the good ideas. Why else would everyone follow my example?". By Jason's telling, the Thompson twins were the secret agents and James was the leader, because he was the oldest, the best all around, and the most level-headed.

I had experience playing rep soccer in the past, and the pressure and exhaustion Jason had described were what eventually caused me to quit. It was too damn palpable for me to ignore. I had always wondered what kind of crazy a person would have to be to love their sport like that- putting themselves through eighteen-hour weeks of training and the stress of competition alongside school's many existing troubles. He continued rambling on about his 'squad'-the medals they earned, the bets they'd place, the food they were forced to eat, and all the priceless moments outside of practice. The fondness of his memory, without a second thought about the burden of responsibility placed on him, started to illuminate that crazy within me- in a big way.

"What made you quit this year then?" I asked, after letting him revel a bit. I didn't mean to kill his mood, but I was digging at something I had to know.

Jason took a momentary pause. "Why did I quit?" he asked. "Ask the rest of 'em, 'cause I didn't start it."

He pulled up a news article on his phone from six years ago. There were a bunch of kids standing in front of a pool, smiling.

"They wrote articles about us," he said. "That's me. I got gold in the two-hundred fly, and silver in the one-hundred fly". He says he could've won the one-hundred fly as well if he had actually tried and prepared beforehand. I was going to mention the whole lethargy thing,

but felt that would be inappropriate.

"So, was this the beginning of your lift-off? Are the Olympics next?"

"Lift-off? More like the beginning of the end."

"How so?"

"I hated this meet. Either I was up against really big ten-year old's, or none of the other clubs had very good Fraudulence Screening."

He shut his phone, frustrated just thinking about it. "I didn't even try in the two-hundred," he confessed. "I was lazy when I hit the wall. I took my time, I even looked around at the other swimmers for a second. I knew I wouldn't lose." Even adding two seconds to his record time, he still won first place.

"Doesn't that just mean you were really good if you were that much faster than everyone else? Why'd you half-ass it?"

"Because they did first."

When he got out of the pool after, some random that he sees regularly at the meets approached him. It was one of his competitors- one of many that recognized him far better than he did them.

"I just can't beat you dude" the swimmer confessed. He smiled nervously and scratched his head.

Jason stopped talking and looked at me, and I hadn't realized that was the end of his explanation. I gave him a confused smile, "Sounds like an innocent compliment." I said. Jason looked up and sighed aggressively, repulsed by my naivete.

"The Oshawa guys", he declared, "would *never* say shit like that."

When Jason went to high school, because of the distant location from the centres his previous clubs used, he wouldn't be able to attend any of the after-school practices regularly scheduled. In response, he decided that he'd have to switch clubs. It was a bitter-sweet departure from his old teammates, but he thought that he'd quickly make new friends at this new club, and continue to improve. Apparently, he was dead wrong.

"You'd think for a club that was so undisciplined that the people would at least be *fun* by contrast. But given all the leniency in the world, these idiots still found a way to be fuckin boring.

"You sure that wasn't just because you never grew up with them? Maybe that's why

you were more distant”.

“Even the kids that knew each other there were distant. I’m telling you, compared to the last club, these guys felt empty...”

Jason was convinced that the difference was in the coaching. If the coaches had just been stricter with the kids there, then maybe they’d actually care. But they weren’t going to change.

“Well this club sucked, and the last one wasn’t an option. But you didn’t quit until you were eighteen?”

“I thought I could help the place” said Jason. “Oshawa had a different feeling that really made it right. Even if it weren’t competitive, it still had that family vibe that made it so fun. If I could just create that again, maybe the competitive spirit would come after.”

“And? How’d that go?”

“How do you think?”

Jason’s last meet was at the beginning of last summer, and was also the day that he quit swimming for good. In the years leading up to it, he’d been in contact with the Oshawa club from time to time, whenever there was a swim meet. He says the Thompson twins quit swimming entirely in the ninth grade. James followed a year after, saying the club wasn’t ‘the same without Jason’. Corrie was still holding on by a thread, but he never had the talent to catch up to Jason at this age.

“I didn’t show up to practices very much myself anymore, so I thought it would be a surprise to the Pickering guys when I showed my face for this meet”. Jason took a sip from his water bottle, like it was the most refreshing experience he’d had since jumping into the pool. “So would you believe me”, he said, “when I say that the head coach didn’t even fucking show up?”

The coach who did appear was normally the coach for lower level swimmers. He wasn’t a bad person, by any stretch, but the fact there frustrated Jason into treating him like one.

“I pulled the same shit as that time I was thirteen” I said. “I added three seconds during my qualifier for the two-hundred freestyle. I almost failed to qualify, actually”

“How’d that coach react?”

“Told me I swam like a douchebag.”

Jason wasn’t done. In the final race, he decided to give it his all. He placed second to one of his new club teammates that specialized in this format. According to Jason, he did it to spit in the Coach’s face, but it sounded like he did exactly what the guy had wanted.


“Smart move”, I said, untruthfully. “Although I don’t think that makes you the brain”.

Jason looked at me, puzzled. “What am I then?”

“I think you’re the leader” told him.







04  
NON  
FICTION



# Marked

## Deborah Ocholi

"Do you believe girls should have equal rights?"

I am on Bloor street on Saturday evening searching for a CIBC ATM that I will soon find is out of service, when a man approaches me. It's five pm and I have just been released from an eight-hour job training session. The journey from Scarborough to the University of Toronto St. George campus took two hours this morning and so I have been awake for a nauseatingly lengthy amount of time. There is slight buzzing behind my eyelids, made worse by the brightness of the deceptively blue sky, which hides the fact that the sun has not yet appeared today.

His name is Chris or Craig or Tom, and he is wearing a cobalt lanyard with a pin of the same colour stuck to it. On the pin, a smoky, white stick figure is encircled; the type of logo that was meant to look like a child's drawing but was meticulously crafted by some computer design major I'm sure. His dirty blonde hair is tied at the nape of his neck and covered with a baseball cap for a team I have never heard of. I know that he is a fundraiser for the same organization I almost worked for in my first year of university (almost, until I realized that my sensitivity to being ignored or insulted would not let me be successful in that career).

Chris or Craig or Tom, who I'll just call Chris, gives me the rundown of things I know and things I don't about Plan International and 'Because I am a Girl'. I feel like I have time to waste and severe writers block, so I listen intently, practicing the good conversation skills I've just learned at my work training. I let Chris speak to me for 30 minutes and am sure to make eye contact.

"Guess how many children 'Because I am a girl' has put through school all over the world," Chris asks enthusiastically. He has nice teeth. Slightly stained and aesthetically crooked; like he is real and flawed and safe.

I feel outgoing today, so I play along. "I dunno," I force a giggle, "1 million?" He exposes more of his bent teeth. "40 million," he practically sings.

A genuine smile creeps into my cheeks.

"That's a huge number of girls saved from being victims of child marriage." He sets his hand up for a high five as if I have been part of the saving. My heavy bag weighs down my arm as I reach up to barely touch his palm with mine.

"That's amazing," I say, "My mom was almost a victim of child marriage." "

Whoa. Where's your mother from?"

I like Chris because his smile never falters. "Nigeria."

"That's one of the many places we're located!"

I don't pledge a monthly donation to Chris because I owe the government thousands of dollars already. Until I said it to him, I had never seriously considered my mother, nor all the friends and family she knew who were married to men much older than them, as victims of child marriage. Even she, a few days prior, mentioned that she did not find any events in her life noteworthy or interesting enough to write about.

I wander into the Bathurst subway station, sneaking through the open gates without paying. Increasing pressure in both my bladder and my uterus screams at me to find a wash-room. As I step into the eastbound train car, I let my mind travel to charcoal.

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There was nothing distinct about the day that my grandmother, Janet, left her daughter, Ada, with a woman from the village. The Nigerian air was still humid, and the sun was painted on the sky in the same spot it had always been. Janet planned to go food shopping and traveling with children is not ideal during times of war.

Everything I know about Nigeria's civil war, I found out through two sources. The first was through Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's novel, *Half of a Yellow Sun*. The second source was my parents' hazy memories of how they got their tribal marks.

Ada was born into the Idoma tribe in the Village of Otukpo three years before the Biafran war began. Her people were known for being hospitable, kind and often with skin of a lighter complexion, much like the Igbos. The physical resemblance between these two tribes placed the minority Idoma group in danger of being mistaken for the larger Igbo tribe, and therefore, being attacked by the Hausa's.

While Janet was gone, cries of approaching Hausa militia sounded through the village. Petrified parents raced to find their children before the men arrived, lest they be taken like they had seen before. One by one, the people of Otukpo lined the village children up and slashed their cheeks with blades.

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I am lost at the Eaton centre trying to find a Best Buy. My low-cost laptop is causing problems only five days after purchase and I have just paced through the same white-walled hallway four times. A man whose head is carpeted with grey fluff lets his curious eyes travel back and forth with me. I can feel my heavy denim jacket, and the overly stuffed leather purse on my arm. As I finally ascend the escalators at the end of the hallway and step into the large electronics store, pools of sticky sweat feel cool against my armpits.

20 minutes later, I am confused and helpless amongst rows of electronics taller than me. Bored employees clad in blue t-shirts and matching lanyards blur past me, avoiding eye contact. Frustrated, I call out to a teenager who leans against a desk, chatting with his friend while swinging his lanyard around. "Can I get some help over here?"

The boy rolls his eyes before reluctantly sulking towards me; how dare I ask him to do his job? I bite my lip to suppress rude remarks, feeling smoke within my veins. Then I think that heat and rude employees are better than razor blades slashing against my cheeks. I think that maybe I'm being dramatic. That is, until the teenager turns into an aisle three rows away from me and I lose that thought amidst a string of frustrated words that invade my mind.

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Before the war, the tribal markings on the cheeks were a method used to ward off demons from children who had fallen ill. During, however, it was used to differentiate tribes who were not involved in the fight.

Upon her return, and seeing what had been done to Ada's face, Janet wept bitterly, mourning her fair daughter's skin. Her father, Isa, an army general, let his anger boil and sizzle all over the village, locking up everyone who had allowed his daughter to be tattooed in the guardroom. He did not allow the addition of the charcoal, which usually darkened the cuts and formed tattoos, so Ada's face healed and scarred lightly, marks laying incomplete like thin

dents upon her cheeks.

Isa's love for his daughter was a wildfire, shielding her from the world. When he died, it was believed he had been spiritually attacked by his enemies. Moments before his last, he said to his doctor that, out of his 10 children, Ada must go to school. He knew that it would be difficult for all eight sons and two daughters to be supported through to post secondary education, but he truly believed that if Ada made it, she would take care of the family that he was leaving behind.

I suppose that each one of his words was like its own flaming block of wood resting on my mother's back. I suppose the continuous burning against her skin was greater than any insult her family spat at her.

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The girl in blue at customer service scans a small black box in front me. "That's \$99.99."

My forehead scrunches up as I inhale deeply, fighting to stay calm. "I asked for the 1.5 terabyte external hard drive for \$59.99."

"This is the only one we have."

I produce my smartphone and unlock the screen, presenting an image of the shelf tag. My experience with the staff so far had me thinking the picture would come in handy. "This clearly says \$59.99."

She blinks slowly. "Lemme check again." I can't even muster the energy to smile smugly.

As she ruffles through the cabinet, I slide the notification panel on my phone down. The screen is littered with missed calls and text notifications. I'm late. I type out a quick text to my friend letting her know I would get to the restaurant as soon as Best Buy employees learn to do their jobs. I slide the phone back into my pocket as the girl returns to the desk, a grey box in her hand this time.

She places it down in front of me and adjusts the monitor screen in front of her. I watch her thin fingers click the mouse and then the keyboard in front of her repeatedly, wondering if my 1-year old niece could do this faster. Finally, she scans the new box. "That will be

\$67.60”

I sigh at the addition of the Toronto tax fee, the last of my energy draining out of me as I tap my debit card against the payment machine.

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When my mother was 12, she had many suitors, most of them above the age of thirty and wealthy. Most of her female classmates had been married before they reached this age.

“A girl who is not married by the age of 12 is a prostitute,” her uncles would proclaim, staring accusingly at her, “a girl who goes to secondary school is a prostitute.”

She considered agreeing to a marriage so long as it meant she could still go to school, but remembered her cousin Atum, who had been coerced into such a marriage, and had never been allowed to return. No, she decided, she would remain unmarried until her education was complete.

The first time her uncle kicked her out of his house, it was because she had refused to marry a man named Oche over the fact that he was much too old, despite his many promises to bring her to Canada. The second time, it was because of Musa. Musa was her youngest suitor - only in secondary school - and village royalty. My mother never defined the terms of his royal status to me; she would just say, matter-of-factly, that he was. He had extremely fair skin, a ‘half-caste’, they called him. She would often remind me that Musa was “very fine”.

With all he had to offer, her family could not understand why she did not like him. She liked him fine, she assured them, she just was not ready to be married. They kicked her out because she had obviously chosen to live the life of a prostitute and would be a bad influence on their children. Each time she was told to pack her things and go, she would move in with her grandmother, tending to farms, as all the other children did, for some extra cash.

I always imagined child marriage victimization to be a result of such a display of force that the girls would have no choice. I’m sure that a great number of the time, that is the case. However, in my mother’s instance, it was a different show of power; a tactic based on brainwashing, discouraging and the pressure from financial insecurity. Still, she refused all male advances.

As the years went by, she spent her holidays in Kaduna, at her cousin’s home to es-

cape the onslaught of pressure and emotional abuse that came with demanding a choice. It was in Kaduna she met my father.

Mathew Ocholi was an older classmate of her cousin’s. They interacted briefly over the years, but it was not until Ada announced that she would continue her education to the post-secondary level - inspiring chaos and disappointment in her family – and moved to remain in Kaduna, that they began to know one another.

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It would seem sensible that someone who had fought her uncles as passionately as my mother did, would have a life goal. She wanted to stand confidently in an operating room beside a doctor, clothed in solid colored scrubs and aiding in saving the life of an unconscious patient lying on the table.

If each soul were entitled to a karmic settlement after a finite amount of struggle, I might announce that my mother was accepted to nursing school, wed my father and immigrated abroad, where they now exist at peace with the world and their dreams. I might imply that Canada was the sunset at the end of this ethnic fairy-tale.

Ada was admitted into nursing school twice and each time, it cost 200 naira to register; 200 naira that no amount of farm work could bring her. When she was also accepted into Kaduna Polytechnic, she had no choice but to accept because of the reduced fees. Still, she may have missed the deadline to register, if not for Mathew, a struggling student in his own right, who sent her the remaining 20 naira that was required.

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In the summer of 2017, my father was working in Calabar and I had joined him there to do some research on the state of girl-child education in Nigeria.

I was there for two months but the research only took one week, which means I had seven weeks to analyze and write up my findings as well as prepare a presentation for a conference in July. Anyways, all this means is that I did research for one week at the start of my visit, and everything else in the two weeks before I left. In the time between, I mostly slept, ate and tried to avoid the rat with whom I shared my room. Otherwise, I’d lie still on the couch, since any movement in the uncomfortable heat would cause me to sweat.



Every night, my father would skype with my mother who was in our home in Calgary. They would catch up on each other's lives, but the calls would mostly consist of them working on her assignments together. I would watch them from my position on the couch as my father tried to understand nursing principles so that he could explain them to my mother.

One particularly hot evening, when there was no power in the house and it was not late enough in the day to turn on the generator, my mother called, almost in tears. She'd failed an important test, setting her back in her studies yet again. I could not see her face, but I could estimate the pain she felt since I saw it on my father's face, spotlighted in the dark room by the screen of his Ipad.

Once they hung up, he turned to me. "Deborah." His breathing was quick and his stare, accusatory. I searched my memory for what I had done wrong that day. He continued: "You people," he was referring to me and my four siblings, "better tell your mummy to drop this nursing thing. She has high blood pressure and these people," referring now to the nursing school, "just keep stressing her. When I talk, it's like I don't want her to follow her dreams. Of course, I hope that she can do it, but she's fifty-something now and I would rather have my wife alive." He points a finger at me and it trembles just a bit. "If you refuse to say anything, and something happens to her, I will not be happy with you."

I gazed up at my father. His large frame seemed smaller in the darkness of the living room. As he wandered off to start the generator, I considered his point. I think that he just wanted someone to know how worried he was, and that was the only way he could show it. He knew as well as I did, that nothing I could say would stop my mother. A faint whirring sounded from the backyard and gradually grew louder. The bulbs in the room sprung to life all at once, bright, white light flooding my sight.

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It is only the second week in September, yet the air tonight is crisp as it brushes roughly against my face. Cold intakes of breath pass throughout my body and I feel the knots and kinks that have been building up throughout the day. Toronto's skyline is blindingly alight, casting a spotlight down on Dundas square, the blackness of the night a backdrop to the bustling life. A group of teenagers pose against a lit-up wall as one of them squats and

splits, almost lying on the dirty ground, to take their picture. A soot-painted man and his large golden retriever recline against the overflowing garbage can, sitting on flattened pieces of cardboard.

I'm ranting into my earphones at my boyfriend about my day, sidestepping the man who shoves a 'YOUR CHOICE IS ILLEGAL' poster at me. A crowd of people surround me at the intersection, awaiting the signal.

I am not a superstitious person. My grandfather passed away from kidney failure, not due to the curses of his enemies, and I find it difficult to believe that sick children become well again because of line tattoos made on their faces. Yet sometimes, I think about charcoal. I think about my mother's marks and the black dust that was never smeared into them. If demons and bad luck could be warded away by the simple darkening of facial marks, if the superstition were true, what did that mean for her life? I wonder if her father's consuming love is the reason that she, at the age of 54, is in nursing school with girls like me, whose biggest stressor that day was a broken ATM or rude employees. Was it all just bad luck? A curse? I am constantly trying to find a reason for her story.

I think of my father who has only one mark on his cheek and while his was filled with charcoal, I do not think it is enough for the two of them to share. My mother has six marks across her cheeks; three on each side, like a lion's whiskers, if you please. I prefer the realistic view: she was slashed across the face repeatedly with a blade.

I think about Chris again, and his aesthetically crooked teeth. I think my mother would like him. She would wonder if Plan International existed while she was tending farms and applying to Kaduna Polytechnic. They did.

I am not a superstitious person, but maybe decades ago, someone like me met someone like Chris on a busy street on a stressful day. Maybe they let him talk about things they knew and things they didn't but did not leave a donation. I try to ignore the possibility that maybe my donation, as easy as tapping my debit card against a machine, could have given somebody else's mother a choice.

Across the busy road, the blue outline of a man tells me to walk.

# Happy Pills

*Chloe Troicuk*

**\*SEVERE TRIGGER WARNING\***

*Suicide, Self-Harm, Depression*

The blade slid across her pale wrist so smoothly she couldn't feel the cut happening until she saw the blood come gushing out, dripping down her arm, and onto the ceramic tile of bathroom. This was Elle's nightly ritual. As her parents were downstairs, watching the late night news, Elle would hide in the bathroom and break out her old trusted friend. Good blades don't last long. The more she cut the more they dull down, not cutting deep enough into the skin for her to feel it. Elle's body felt at one with the blade, dull, lifeless, yet fucking dangerous if left unsupervised.

Her parents hadn't quite figured out yet that she was cutting. They knew things were bad but they had no idea just how bad things had become. Cutting was her little secret, it was dangerous and she loved the thrill of it. It was the only thing that made Elle feel alive. She needed to feel something other than the numbness that had set into her bones.

The psychiatrist, Dr. Marvin, had just put her on Prozac, hoping this medication would change the chemical imbalance in her brain. Before the Prozac Elle was depressed but the pills made her suicidal. All she could think of was dying or cutting. She would sit in her room for hours alone, dreaming up fantastic plans of suicide. She thought about how it would feel to drown in the tub, but she was too afraid of her lungs filling with water, suffocating her. She could've slit her wrists, straight down the middle. Slice from the wrist to the elbow, and watch the life bleed out of her body. What if she took all of the so called "happy pills" at once? Then laid down to sleep, forever. There seemed to be endless options.

Once she was put on Prozac her parents started noticing that shit had seriously hit the fan. It was as though Elle was possessed by the depression demon from hell. She began to wear dark make up, black lip gloss, thick eye liner, and at least 30 layers of mascara. She died her hair black and lost 20 pounds. Elle turned into a completely different person than

the bubbly blonde girl from before. The old Elle had killed herself to make room for the devil spawn Elle.

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On March 25, 2014, Elle woke up, opened her blinds, and stared out at the big tree on the front lawn. The green buds on the tree were finally beginning to pop up, the bare branches slowly coming back to life after a long winter. She imagined what a noose would look like hanging from that tree.

Elle got dressed, hiking up her kilt as high as it could go without revealing her entire ass. She kept the dress shirt slightly unbuttoned at the top. She left little to the imagination but felt confident enough to pull it off at her strict catholic school. She wore a sweater over top of the blouse so her dad wouldn't notice how risky the outfit was.

Downstairs, her dad was sitting at the kitchen table with his laptop out. He had started working from home since the psychiatrist had told him to keep an eye on her. Each morning was the same thing; Elle would come downstairs to her father asking 20 questions about her mental state that day.

"On a scale of 1-10 how depressed are you?"

"On a scale of 1-10 how anxious are you feeling?"

"On a scale of 1-10 how suicidal are you feeling today?"

She snorted loudly at the question. "On a scale of 1-10, I would say I'm about a solid 13 on that last scale," Elle said, laughing.

Her father had this look in his eyes she had never seen before. It was genuine fear. He was afraid of what she was capable of, what she was willing to do to herself. His round face was elongated by his frown. His kind green eyes, the same as Elle's, were boring into her soul. She couldn't stand to see her father look so upset. Elle stopped laughing and looked back at him sadly. They sat in silence for a moment, then he asked, "would you like to go to the hospital?" They had only asked Elle that question a handful of times before and each time it took her a second to think about the question carefully. This question meant that they were gravely considering the fact that their child was a serious danger to herself.

"No, Dad. I'm fine," she said with a fake smile plastered on her face. "I'm sorry, that was a stupid joke. Everything is fine."

"Well, you don't look fine, Elle. You look like you haven't slept in weeks. Why don't you let me take you to the hospital? Just to see if they can give you a little more help than you're currently receiving."

"I have class to get to," she said, eyes moistening. "I can't go to the hospital right now." She attempted to blink the tears away.

"Don't worry about class. We can call the school right now and tell them you're not well. Come on, honey."

"Are you kidding? I can't skip. I have AP English first period. If you miss a certain number of the classes, you can't take the AP exam for university credit. This class is extremely important. I won't miss it," she was now crying steadily.

"Okay, don't you have second period spare?" he asked. "Come home right after first period and we'll go to the hospital. But if I let you go you need to promise you will be back here right at 11. If you are not back, I will be going out to look for you."

Elle knew that there was no other option at that moment. Even if she wanted to kill herself that day, before her dad put her in a hospital, she didn't have anything on her to do it with. "Okay, I promise," she said. He got up from the kitchen table to wrap his arms around her. It was a nice hug, one that made Elle feel safe, even if just for a moment. He pulled away to get a look at Elle's face, to make sure she wasn't lying about coming home.

"I love you, Dad."

"Love you too, honey. I'll see you in a couple hours."

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On the drive to school Elle briefly toyed with the idea of crashing the car. But that could possibly end up hurting other drivers or pedestrians in the process. She wanted to die but didn't want other people to go down with her. This was a solitary mission. She wracked her brain trying to think of how she could possibly get out of going to the hospital that day. In all honesty she had no desire to be saved. Nor did she want to spend an extended period of time in a smelly old hospital with people even worse off than her. Maybe she could ask her

friends at school how they thought she should handle this. But then remembered her two best friends currently weren't speaking to her and hadn't been for weeks. Elle had gotten black out drunk at a party and said some pretty horrible things. The worst part was that she couldn't even remember any of it the next day. She couldn't remember anything. But the next morning, she woke up to multiple messages from friends saying they were, "fed up with her bull shit," and quite frankly Elle didn't blame them. She had tried to explain to them that it was the Prozac and not her. She tried telling them that it wasn't her who had said all those nasty things, but the version of her on Prozac.

Dr. Marvin warned Elle against drinking while on this medication but she ignored him. She had drank on all the other medications they had put her on in the past so why should it matter this time? After waking up the next morning and not remembering anything she decided to google what would happen if you drank alcohol on Prozac. Google proceeded to tell Elle that if you mixed the two together it may cause you to commit acts that are out of character and have zero knowledge of it the next day, which is exactly what had happened. She felt terrible about what she had said or done but felt worse about the fact that she wanted to die and her two best friends in the whole world didn't really seem to give a shit. Elle knew she had pushed them to their limits with the whole devil spawn bit but she expected them to be by her side no matter what. She always stuck by them when they did stupid or ignorant things. Elle felt betrayed by these two and in some sense that made wanting to die easier. It gave her more of a reason to leave this earth while she still could.

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Elle arrived to the classroom right as the last bell rang, signaling the beginning of class. She quickly walked in, attempted to smile at Delaney and Danielle but they just ignored her and continued their conversation. It was as though she was invisible to them. Elle took her seat directly behind them, praying that they would turn around and say something, anything to her. Maybe if they knew how much she was suffering they would've turned around. They never did though. When the bell rang they got up from their seats and walked out the door not looking back once. She sat there until the next class slowly began to filter in.

"Elle, the next class is coming in," Her English teacher asked. "Are you okay?"



"Yeah. Sorry, sir. Have a nice day," she left in a haze.

She walked out to her car in the parking lot slowly, really not wanting to go back home but there didn't seem to be another choice. She quickly searched her backpack and pulled out a small blade she had hidden in it. The second Elle got into the car she rolled up her sleeves and lightly pressed the blade into her already marked up forearm. Her arm was covered in either fresh cuts, mildly infected cuts, or the bright pink of a new scar. There didn't seem to be much room left to make new cuts so she begun tracing over old scars to open new wounds. Elle did this quickly and efficiently. She didn't want any kids from the smoker's corner to see what she was doing inside the car. If her dad was going to make her go to the hospital she wanted to self medicate first.

On the drive home Elle called her sister, Courtney. She figured that her parents had made her sister go to a hospital when she was about Elle's age and maybe she would help her out. She picked up the phone fairly quickly, which meant dad had already warned her about what was going on.

"Hey, Elle, where are you?"

"Hi, Courtney. I'm on my way home from school, don't worry. Listen I need your help. Dad is trying to make me go to the hospital today and honestly I'm fine I don't need to go. Can you please try to tell him that I'm fine?"

"I can't do that, Elle. If you need help you need to go get it, okay? There is absolutely no reason for you to be suffering like this when there is help available. If you need to go to the hospital who cares? We won't tell anyone. But you need help, we all see it."

"You know how awful hospitals are, Courtney. You've been there and you fucking hated when mom and dad made you go!"

"We have two different problems," she said, stifling back sobs. "I had a drug problem and you have severe depression. I don't want you to end up fucking dead. I need you in this life with me. No one else understands mom and dad like we do. No one understands each other like we do. So please go get the help you need before it's too late."

The two sat on the phone in silence for a bit until Elle finally caved. "Okay. I will go get help. But you better come visit me every day and bring food. I don't want to eat that dis-

gusting hospital food."

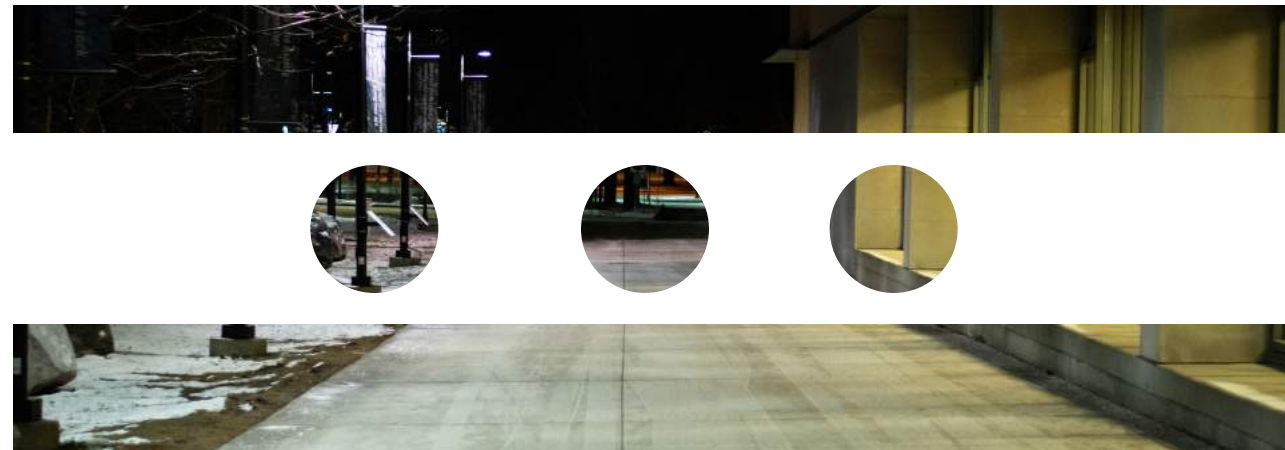
"Thank you. Go home, talk to dad and everything will work out. I love you."

"I love you too."

It seems that there really was no decision to make. Whether Elle liked it or not she had to go get help. There was no more trying to convince her family or herself that she was okay because she wasn't. Nothing was going to be okay until she got the help she needed. It was either keep going the way she was and probably kill herself, or save everyone the heart-ache and try to make things better. When your family is throwing you a life line in the middle of the endless ocean of pain, you should take it. Elle couldn't see all the other people who cared about her. Instead she cared about two insensitive people who really never gave a shit about her to begin with. All of that is over now, Elle decided that she needed to get better for herself and the people who loved her.

With a deep breath, Elle opened the front door of her house and walked in.

"Dad, I'm ready."



# Midland and Lawrence E

## *Noor Gatih*

You might miss it if you're driving at night, through the city streets where two roads intersect. On Lawrence, a black gate missing a lock is left wide open. As you cross from Midland, the golden spear-heads appear to be a dirty yellow, chipping away in the wind. You wonder how many times they've been repainted, in an attempt to preserve what is now on the cusp of being an ancient artifact.

Cars go in and out. You notice two extinguished lamps attached to the top of the gate; perhaps they were once lit. The fog is quite distracting, until you make out a white tower. It stands alone, looking out of place in the midst of apartments and bright neon plazas. A crescent moon attached to the top of the tower, nearly gives it away. Until your eyes wander down to a black dome.

Underneath the Arabic letters it reads, "JAM'E ABU BAKR SIDDIQUE." Unlike the Meca, this one is silent. Then it registers, that this isn't the "East" but actually, the east end of Toronto.

It's chilly out, the yellow stained glass windows look warm and inviting. So you put your ignorance aside and you walk through the gate. You hesitate at the door, unsure if this is a boundary you should cross. A sign with two bold arrows reads,

"Sisters enter from Westside, Brothers enter from Eastside."

Instead of opening it, you peer in from the outside.

A white book is propped open in front of a row of young boys as they bow their heads in full submission. Still, their prayers cannot be heard.

Making your way to the Westside of the building, you spot a door that's left ajar. Inside, there is a shelf lined neatly with little shoes and big shoes, this must be a traditional custom. A woman approaching the entrance walks frantically as she's in the process of covering her hair. She smiles at you, taking notice of your pants and your disheveled hair. That's when you realize that this is not an institution or a fancy, "decorative" building. It's a place of worship.

You decide to leave.

As you're standing outside of the gate, a sign that's half torn flaps in the wind, "Food for the needy."

Across the street the Cash for Gold sign gleams in an ironic yellow, projecting effortlessly in your direction. Next to it, a sequence of other beaming signs, *Pizza Pizza*, *Freshco*, *TD*, *Dollar Tree*. Despite the harsh wind, consumers flow in and out. Some are carrying necessities in grocery bags, while others are waiting in line to check their credit card debt. You instinctively make your way to the hustle, walking through a maze of parked cars.

You stop when you hear a woman yelling at her child to put on his seatbelt, but the kid won't budge, and continues to kick stubbornly. The woman gives up, sighing loudly. Her heels echo on the wet ground as she click-clacks around the car.

To your left you notice two men lingering near an empty school bus. They whisper quietly in a foreign dialogue. An exchange happens: one slips the other money or was it gold? Kush? Porn? Either way, it was a commodity too valuable to be shown in such a public space. When the settlement is over, each retreats back to the corner they came from. The bus abandoned once more.

To your right, a man is loading not ten, but 12 cases, of Dasani water bottles into the back of his van. He looks up at you, greeting you with a, *I can't believe these were on sale*, smile. He seems oblivious to the fact that plastic corporations have magically been able to capitalize on water. Next in the making, mandatory oxygen masks that will be sold at your local convenient store.

Right outside of the *Pizza Pizza*, a group of middle-schoolers are jostling around. Profanity spewing out of their mouths, the shortest one in the group points at his enemy.

"Bitch, fuck you, fuck you, fuck yo-"

"Yo, run-up. Ama take you out right now, pussy."

"Am not no pussy bitch, you piece of gay shit."

A man stepping out of the *Pizza Pizza* with his family stops. With a pizza slice in his hand he looks down at the little guy.

"Stop using that kind of language, you're being very disrespectful."

“First of all you’re not my dad, like who are you though?”

The man shakes his head and leaves with his family. The initial feud continues.

“Yeah so as I was saying, you’re a fucking fruit cup, you gay faggot.”

“I’m not fucking gay, you piece of shit, have I ever tried tickling your balls?”

“Ew what the fuck.”

“I bet that gave you a boner, you fucking fag.”

“No it didn’t, you fucking waste yute, you dumb ass fart mouth.”

As you step away from the crowd, you wonder what this place looked like when it was just a forest. No neon signs or noisy cars. Even you and those like *you* didn’t exist. Then you begin to notice an absent presence. Somewhere under folds of history, the “who” is erased. It hits you slowly at first, until street names like Lawrence and Midland begin to sound wrong. Words such as “them” and “other” weigh heavy on your tongue.

When you glance back at the mosque sitting peacefully, you see a future representation of our urbanized society. That actually, urbanization is not taller buildings and more technology, but rather an openness, a bridge that accepts various ideologies. Without any form of conversion, these buildings become a foundational landmark in Canada’s history.

