

Issue 001

# VAUGHAN STREET DOUBLES



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# How To Make A Vaughan St. Double:

Step 1: Forget those shot glasses you were gifted are actually doubles.



Kangaroo print not needed but it is encouraged!

Step 2: Grab your spirit of choice, and pour yourself a "single" with the glass.



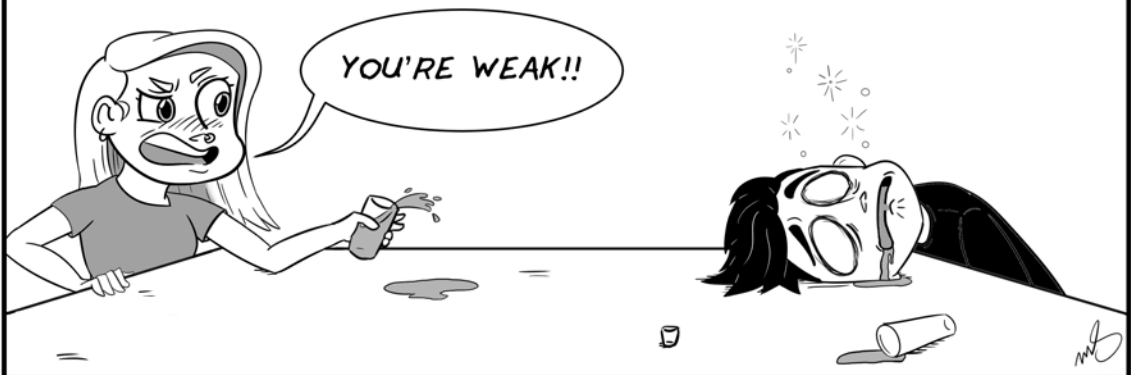
Step 3: Make it a "double!"



Step 4: Enjoy none the wiser!



Step 5: Repeat for 3 to 6 months, wondering why you are getting drunk so fast until the painful realization of the trash person you have become!



Bruno Schulz  
BJA SAMUEL

The bullet passed through the skull and bone, like a cracked egg, like a broken clock. It sliced through the infinite space and whistled through the prismatic structures there. It passed through the many rooms of the sordid and the decadent, veiled behind red velvet curtains. Through the labyrinthine streets lined with shops, dusty rooms, , tunnels and parkland, depth upon depth of clear blue sky.

It passed through streets peopled with gentlemen and ladies, beggars and prostitutes. Into shops filled with confectionary and scented with spice and sugar. It passed voluptuous ladies with perfumed cheeks, blushing with rouge. It passed little children biting through layers of buttered pastry and powdery sugar. It passed through lines of tailor's dummies, through crocodiles and chirruping birds. It passed through front rooms, back rooms, cellars and attics.

It passed through rooms curtained with tapestries of exquisite beauty and rooms curtained with cheap moldering muslin. Silk and hemp rotted alike and deliquesced on impact. It shattered stained glass windows and ordinary windows alike. It tore open canvases ancient and new. It penetrated the dark layers of unborn tales, stacked high in dank piles that moldered like rotten autumn leaves. It buried tangled vine strewn columbariums filled with spicy smells and desiccated corpses and sealed the reliquaries there forever.

It destroyed musical instruments, doctor's tools and tools for carpentry. It put an end to the ravings of a madman and the sensual yearnings of another. It sterilized the fecund hummus of the human brain. It disturbed the sediment at the bottom of ancient wine barrels. It emptied vessels filled with honey, ginger beer and syrup with a single solitary piercing sound. A little boy turned the pages of a stamp collection as the bullet passed. He watched men with coal black mustaches and smoothly oiled expressive eyes walk the streets doffing their caps to passers by.

The endless rooms there had a mythic power. The storerooms were the depositories for a million ideas. The objects stored there took on meanings beyond mere objects; the air itself took on a meaning but with subtlety of purpose. The hot odorous air there was fragranced with jasmine with raspberry syrup. The sensual aroma of ladies bodies carnally perfumed, holding a boot to the mouth and standing proudly over their lovers. The aura of femininity imbibed the backrooms and parlours, breasts swollen with milk, mothers nursing babies, was lost as the bullet flew through it.

Within the infinitely solid blackness of the hot nights of summer, black roses bloomed within the black firmament and across the blanket darkness of the mind white poppy seeds were scattered and swirled in milky eddies. Then like sun-spoiled photographs it faded to nothing in the bullets wake.

The bullet drew a single thread of red silk through the rooms of his mind. It slayed the neonate metaphors and myths just coming into being. The line it drew bled, it seeped blood red and fresh, an iron taste and smell. Mangy corpses lay gutted beneath blackly entangled shrubbery. They dragged themselves through the thickets there. The bullet flew through an old apothecary shattering the lachrymatories, bell jars and demijohns. It split the glass, spilling the perfume, bath salts and medicines that evaporated.

The bullet flew through time over the corpse-strewn battlefields of the western front and across the wet ink of newly written treaties. It passed into the future, over concentration camps and the piles of dead too big to be contained by mere facts. The bullet incinerated the people cowering in Dresden and it poisoned the survivors of Hiroshima. It had started in a factory, one of many others in a line of millions but ended in the chamber of a gun and now it travels through this infinite space. Each of its brothers found a target, in flesh in bone, in trees, in shop fronts, in masonry and brickwork. It pulls behind it the bloodstained tapestry of time. The finely woven moth-eaten tapestry is ugly to behold, moldering with raspberry red patches that spread like spilt ink. The bullet falls indiscriminately through events, through contingency, it travels with an iron will through the subcutaneous layers of the mind. "You killed my Jew. Now I've killed yours!" he boasted.

The loaf of bread kneaded in the bakery. The dough folded and thumped in clouds of flour. Elasticated, stretching, smelling faintly of yeast. Left to rise then baked crusty and brown. Then he paid his money and took the loaf under his arm. He walked home alone on the streets of Drohobycz. That's where the bullet found him. The weight of history bore down on him extinguished him like fingers on a candle flame. It propelled the bullet from the pistol. It gave the officer agency to pull the trigger.

The Coffee Table  
Lori Lancaster

She had planned the words carefully, crafted them on paper, re-written, edited, rehearsed in front of a mirror. She breathed these words. She dreamt these words.

And when she was finally ready to speak these words, she called them.

"Can you come by for coffee, both of you? We need to talk."

There was hesitation on the other end, a reluctance that tasted of understanding and not wanting, more of defiance than of fear. She held her breath. Were they going to refuse her this? And then a sunny "Of course, we'd love to come for coffee dear. How about Friday?"

The sunniness caught her off guard. Had she read too much into that hesitation? "Friday is fine."

A cheerful, "We'll see you then," and the call disconnected before she could respond.

When she answered the door, there was a large object on a dolly standing between her and them. It was old, the stone cracked and much of the once-ornate carving broken. A large padlock held it closed.

"What the hell?"

"Language, dear" The words were soft but the reprimand clear. "We brought you a new coffee table."

"This is a sarcophagus."

"Don't be ridiculous, dear. It's a coffee table. Yours was so ugly." They pushed past her, wheeling in the sarcophagus, shoving her coffee table out of the way and planting the hideous thing in the middle of her living room. Like a magician's trick, a large doily emerged from a pocket and became a tablecloth.

They sat down. She opened her mouth to speak but he interrupted her to complain about the neighbour's dandelions infecting his carefully kept lawn. She opened her mouth to speak and was interrupted by news of a cousin's new baby. And on it went until the words in her heart were sucked into the sarcophagus to die and join the dust of a million other unspoken words.

Finally she served coffee and cookies. They rested their cups and plates on the sarcophagus and talked about the weather.



Dark Snow  
William Falo

Far away from the throngs of people cheering on the dog sled teams passing through the checkpoint in town, I stared at the open bottle of sleeping pills then at the crooked picture of my missing husband. It's been six months since his plane vanished from the radar. Loneliness overwhelmed me. I couldn't face anyone. "Poor Melody." They all said. There were even rumors that he ran away with another woman. Isolation became the answer, but not without consequences. I wanted to get out. Leave this place, but how could I after he disappeared. The bottle of sleeping pills was the answer. Tonight, I planned on taking all of them.

The distant barking made me furious. I saw a sled dog kennel once, each dog was chained to a small house, their range limited by the heavy weight around their neck. It made me sick and I walked out of the kennel. My husband wanted to start a dog sled team, but I refused after seeing that kennel. I crushed his dream. Maybe he could have done it the right way, but does anyone here?

The barking came closer. That never happened before. I pulled the shotgun off the wall and headed to the door. No musher was going to cut through my land taking a shortcut on their way to make money for himself.

I waited outside the front door as the barks got louder, snowflakes started to fall and I wiped my eyes. The gun became heavier the longer it took, but I still lifted it when the dogs entered the field. The front two ran like maniacs dragging the slower dogs in the back like an anchor, their yelps couldn't stop the panicked front dogs. The urge to shoot the musher came to me, but there was none. The dogs pulled an empty sled.

"What the hell?" I dropped the gun then ran out into the field to stop the sled, but how do you stop a train coming at you at full speed. The answer was that you don't.

The dogs saw me, but they kept going and knocked me over, but I managed to grab onto the sled.

"Whoa. Whoa." I yelled out. The dogs closest to the sled gave up, their bodies slid on the snow. They were in trouble. With all my strength which wasn't much nowadays, I pulled myself up and grabbed the handles. I pulled on the brake and kept yelling. Approaching a fence, the dogs slowed a bit and I yanked harder on the brake. The lead dogs turned then finally slowed to a stop. The other dogs crashed into each other, except the ones dragged across the snow. They slowly got up. The snow under them a crimson color. They all had bloody paws or booties with red stains, a few held legs up, they all panted.

"Where is the damn musher?"

Nobody came out of the woods following the sled. In the distance, the race went on. Pain flared through me, but it was not unwelcomed. I felt alive and now I had a mission. I would give this musher a piece of my mind and more, but first the dogs. I couldn't get a cellphone connection here, so I used a landline when I needed to contact anyone, but I wasn't calling anyone involved in the race, since they would just get the musher back in the race and drop a few dogs off at a checkpoint. The dropped dogs were doomed if they couldn't race again. Performance culling, they called it.

I struggled to get the back dogs up, they were sore, scratched, and exhausted. After massaging legs, rubbing backs, and a few kind words they got to their feet while the leaders waited. I feared they would take off despite the now locked brake.

Each dog wore a collar with a number on it. No name, a number. The numbers ranged between seventeen and thirty-seven. There were missing numbers. What happened to all the others? I feared the answer.

I managed to slowly release the brake and by walking next to the lead dogs, I led all of them into a large garage with individual stalls we built when we first arrived in Alaska. The dreams of getting horses like the dog sled kennel never came true. I unhooked the sled and shut the door when they got inside. I ran into the house and gathered up all the blankets I could along with buckets I filled with water. I lugged them all into the garage.

They drank and curled up on the blankets. Night came quickly and I stayed with them in the garage. I forgot about being lonely and I worked through the night keeping the dogs comfortable. A few still limped. Nobody came for them through the night, even though they could easily follow the tracks in the snow.

Despite my desire for isolation, I needed to get help. I called the local animal hospital. They didn't believe me, so they called the police.

After an hour, a police car drove up and two state policemen got out and looked around. They saw the tracks and the dark snow where the dog's blood soaked into the snow. They shook their heads and came to the door, but I waved them to the garage.

"What kind of person loses a whole dog team."

"We did receive a report that a musher fell off his sled when the team went against his commands and sped up. He hit a branch."

"Are you kidding me. He's blaming the dogs?"

"Yep."

"The dogs are a mess. He was running them to their death, maybe they were sick of it."

They laughed, I didn't.

"He wants them back. They are his property."

I clenched my fist. "Property?"

"That's the law here."

"So, he can kill them?" I bit my bottom lip.

"Yes. In Alaska he can."

"Tell him I want them or I'll put on the news and internet how bad he treated them."

"He's not going to let you just keep them."

"So, he would rather kill them."

The two state policemen walked away. They made a few calls. After a while, I left and treated the dogs. It would be hard to care for them. Really hard. I might fail, but I couldn't give them back. How could I knowing what would happen to them?

They came back.

"He said, if you pay their medical bills and keep quiet about what happened they are yours. He just wants to race again with a new team and no bad reputation."

I looked at the dog's, they all sat silently and I saw sadness and worry in their eyes. It was justified. Their lives were hanging in the balance and they knew it. If I spoke out most of Alaska would turn against me. I nodded to the policemen.

They left and I heard one of them saying how tough I was, although I felt weak.

The animal hospital sent out a doctor. Medicine was prescribed. I sold everything I could and called a fence company. The dogs filled up all my time, my loneliness dissipated, neighbors stopped by and I let them. I would never hook the dogs to a sled again.

###

On a night that the northern lights flared overhead, I heard an update on the dog sled race. A few dogs died of pneumonia or heart failure, no big deal they said, it happens every year. There were a few that were discovered to be drugged with pain killers, one musher accused another of sabotage, and a few dogs went missing. They were all forgotten as they praised the winning musher, despite the fact that he dropped six dogs during the race. What happened to them? Nobody can answer that question.

I couldn't listen any more. My husband remained missing, but I was found. Ten dogs saved me and I threw away the sleeping pills.

As I removed the collars with the dog's numbers on them, they all gathered around me. Warmth ran through me and I tried to think of names for all of them.

"Who sent you here?" I asked out loud. They answered with barks. What were the odds a runaway dogsled team would come here on the night I was considering taking my life? I couldn't save every sled dog, but maybe I could watch out for them. I could stand up for them, be a voice they can't be. Do something, anything to let people know this is not okay. The mushers race for money, but it's just survival for the dogs. It's not fun for them. They need somebody. They need me and I need them.

Fly, My Pretty  
C E Hoffman

My new pimp's across the street.

I don't know how I can see him when I'm on the third floor, and I don't know how I know it's him when I've never seen him before, but he is clear in my mind as crystal: I can tell from the strut.

Soon he'll be up the stairs, through the door, and I tell myself, "You don't have to do this. You can leave whenever you want."

I see the balcony through those big glass patio doors, and I run and jump!, but I know I'll never fall.

I catch the undercurrent. SWOOP! and flap of arms.

I am over the buildings, and everywhere.

I forgot how good it felt to fly! Dead memories rush back to life: nights and days wind flattered my face, as free as anyone could be.

I soar. I smile.

Soon I am higher than clouds.

Up here, it's only birds and me.

Up here no one can touch me.

I know I can't keep the peak, so I dip to caress the tips of trees. I decide to follow the left road: it looks dangerous, beautiful. The wind has other plans. Once I veer West, she knocks me back, a gulping gushing gust. I grab a branch, it snaps.

"Okay: I'll trust the wind."

LEAP! The wind lifts me like a babe, rushes me East.

For a moment I think I'm even higher than before. Clouds cover me in swarms, but this is fog. I should have known when the hawks didn't follow.

The fog opens for reckless rocks jutting from ocean.

Fear is for those who aren't brave enough to fly.

I screech, duck and dive. The waves crash but the rocks sink and blue stretches above and below.

Now there is nothing but me.

I've never been this far out to sea. The sun falls, the moon rises to tuck it to sleep, and I learn the ocean is alive, and angry. Waves turn to mouths with huge throats and bigger teeth and they snap, snap, snap; I curl my toes, suck my breath and reeeeach.

Even this close to death, I laugh.

The moon falls. The ocean melts. I'm neither falling nor flying; now it's somersaults through space. When I roll right-side-up I'm in a hot spring, and strange, yellow smiles surround me, like the t-shirts that say "Have a nice day", and they speak with bubbles above their heads like those comic books I bought from drugstores as a kid and they say, "Who's this?" and, "You're an ace!"

I wonder where my wings went because I am armless. I think, "Is this the future?" and I'm terrified.

A smile separates from the crowd. They look soft, and they have arms, and they're reaching out to me and my own arms grow back because I'm dying for intimacy.

Freedom's fine, but nothing beats being held.

I submit to a deep, dark hug, one that swallows, forgives, and protects.

I forgot how much I loved this.

The hot spring cools. The smiles disappear.

My new pimp holds me under his head. I am soothed by the rhythm of his chest. I don't know how I know him but I think I always did; I don't know how I can be everywhere at once or how freedom is a feeling in my mouth, folded in my wings, tucked under my belt, and that's why I'm never afraid.

"Where'd you get to?" he says. "I came upstairs and you were gone!"

The End

For This Sublime Summer Night  
Darryl Peters

A pink-red sun sulks behind  
the west-blown smoke of burning  
British Columbia while  
a choir of crickets is lost  
somewhere in unobserved score,  
singing beautiful chaos.

The conductor is huffy;  
he's stabbing a baton in  
furious accusation,  
calling measure eighty-three,  
but he—snob, classically trained—  
doesn't understand the score.

The composer, though, cavorts  
& smiles, smug & satisfied,  
wandering the smoky streets,  
& wondering how soon the  
rains will come. Cherubs amuse  
themselves with flashbulbs above  
clouds holding biblical rain,  
called by electricity  
of new love's first touch.

The lovers hear not the song—  
though the crickets sing for them—  
nor see the cherubs display—  
though dazzling, wild and playful—  
nor mind the first raindrops 'gainst  
the window, for they are lost  
in slow touch & lazy kiss,  
with bright eyes outshining their  
sun's sullen dip to make way  
for this sublime summer night.







I Dreamed Him Up  
Priscilla Green

Most people don't know it, but all that's at some point or another part of our reality has been first conceived in our mind. We fabricate our world, every little piece of it. The barista who prepared your latte this morning: you created her. The client who showed up at the busiest time of your day without an appointment: you created him. The bus driver, the cashier at the grocery store, your best friend, your boss, the strangers you passed by on the street on your way to work: you created them all. You did, or someone else did, it's all the same. Everybody is bringing something into existence all the time, although few are ever consciously aware of that.

I was consciously aware when I invented him, though. At least for the most part. I dreamed him up so carefully, my most precious work of art, I achieved perfection. His eyes were angel eyes, turquoise like the ocean under a passing storm. When he smiled, his eyes smiled too, and his face became brighter than the sun in a clear sky. I made him up to be principled and kind. I gave him so much virtue. He was a product of my mind and, as such, had a piece of my soul. He was destined to be a masterpiece.

It was October when I first saw him materialized in front of me. I was at the reception desk when he walked into the office, dressed in black jeans and a dark grey shirt. He smiled at me when our eyes met.

"Welcome back," I said. "How was the vacation?"

"It was good," he responded. "Not long enough."

That was the first time he existed.

He was the creative director at the ad agency where I worked. He'd been working there for three years. And before that, he'd done other things. He was thirty. He had done a lot of things. I composed a portion of his life, but not all of it. Some things are just consequences of others. Like present, past is defined by a chain of events and thoughts.

The thing about creating, though, is that it's a very sensitive process. You are bringing into reality whatever you think up, even if unintentionally. You lose focus for one second, you allow one wrong thought into your head, and you mess everything up.

It happened when I got distracted. I had seen him, I had fallen for him, I knew he had fallen for me. I took it all for granted. I thought it'd be safe to forget. And, suddenly, he was just a man I wanted to get to know. I might have then imagined someone else in his life, someone who had come before me.

I noticed the wedding ring one day when we were talking by the water cooler. I didn't learn he had a daughter until the end of November. He told me she was four, and he showed me a picture. She had his eyes.

In December, he left the agency.

We exchanged emails. We hung out. We got to know each other. Then he asked me if I was in love with him. I knew I was, but I said I didn't know.

"I can't do this," He told me. "I'm married."

"I know," I said. Of course I knew. She was the flaw in his existence. I had put her there by mistake. If only I could tell him that. "Are you in love with her?" I asked. I knew he could not be. He was in love with me.

"Love fades away with time." He answered.



I wanted to tell him he was wrong. I wanted to tell him real love would never weaken, would never die. I wanted to say something, anything, that would make him stay. But nothing I thought of seemed good enough. So I didn't speak.

"You're too young now," he said, eventually. "But one day you'll understand."

"I do understand," I responded. "I don't accept it, though."

He looked into my eyes for just a moment, but I could see he was hurt. "It's not your choice to make," he whispered, before he walked away.

THE END

kiss boom  
Stuart Buck

there are electrons passing from my lips to yours  
when we kiss  
some infinite number of universes  
dissolve between us in the warm spit of passion  
and when I close my eyes and feel your tongue  
ask such sweet questions it's like  
it's like  
the most enormous thing  
could not possibly mean less  
and I can feel it now  
it is the life that we live again as we die  
and it is long and it is warm and it is easy

Life is—to its credit—  
Darryl Peters

Life is—to its credit—  
    a charming disaster.  
each time I cannot stand  
    to look any longer,  
it touches my hand  
    from across the table,  
reassuring me with  
    its warm grasp;  
it pushes back a loose  
    strand of hair;  
it presses its tropical  
    mouth to my ear &  
talks hot; I feel its  
    crooked, coy smile, so  
I meet its fuck-me-gaze  
    with a raised eyebrow.

Moving  
Kristian Beatty

Saint Pepsi on repeat.  
He goes by a different name now I suppose.  
Things change.

The sun is setting.  
A few of them are.

The water sure sparkles.  
Kind of like Pepsi.  
Maybe it always did.

Will everything be okay?  
I think so.  
I hope so.  
Hey, Google.  
Next song.

## NOT BAD FOR A FRIDAY NIGHT

Dustan j. Hlady

Giles was the only person who knew how old Giles was. In his spirit, he was in his early twenties. His zeal for experience and general lack of knowledge about adult life confirmed this. In his body, he was in his sixties or older, a poet who had always wanted to be a musician. The young twenty-something musicians in Moose Jaw flocked to him. They found his age coupled with his maniac heart endearing. The fact that he usually had grade A, B.C. grass on hand didn't hurt either.

He was invited to read some of his poetry at a local bar between sets of a CCR cover-band called, 'I Put a Smell on You'. His poetry was violent, racist, and sex-filled but it always had a moral lesson at the end.

He selected, "Fis Ting: The Sticky-Handed Chinaman", "Never Rape a Porcupine", "While You're Down There", "A Bag of Cats in the North Saskatchewan" and a few others.

Barb Fletcher approached Giles after the show. She was in her forties, still blonde and keeping with a figure adequately attractive for her age. "I love poets and you are so funny."

"I like blondes and you are probably funny," Giles failed at a reply. She laughed and unnecessarily moved closer. They wedged together between a VLT and the door to the off sale, close enough to guess the drinks on each other's breath.

Lawrence, the drummer for IPASOY, walked by. Barb escaped her conversation with Giles long enough to touch his nineteen-year-old arm. "I loved how you pounded those drums tonight," she oozed.

"Oh, yeah. Thanks. You're Kristen's mum, right?"

She leaned in and whispered, "Yeah, I'm a mum. Some people say I'm a MILF. What do you think?"

He laughed and agreed, "Oh, yeah."

She leaned back. She had Lawrence, twenty years younger in her right hand and Giles, who knows how older, in her left. "What do you boys say you come over to my friend's house for some after-drinks drinks?"

#

They knocked on the West side of a duplex. Barb's friend, Glenda, opened the door. Glenda wasn't unattractive by herself but put next to Barb's spikey blonde hair, perfected face and large, harnessed breasts Glenda looked wide, distorted and unnatural. She invited them inside and made them a mix of Coke and cheap vodka.

The entire night was a strategic maneuvering of bodies. Giles and Lawrence wanted Barb's body. Glenda wanted Lawrence and sometimes Giles' body. And Barb wanted whoever was left over. At one point Glenda got Lawrence as far as sitting on her bed. She danced in the doorway, trapping him until he faked having to go to the bathroom. By six a.m. everyone was still unsexed. Barb, Lawrence and Giles left the house for their respective homes. Giles was ready to slink back to his one bedroom apartment and sleep the day away until Barb suggested, "My place now?"

Giles knew what was up. She wanted them both. He thought that maybe he could play chicken with Lawrence. "There is no way Lawrence is going to want to share a sexual experience with me."

"Your place it is!" Giles answered.

"Fine by me," Lawrence spat.

Giles drove with Barb and Lawrence followed behind. She reached over and rubbed Giles over his pants. "Are you ready for this, Giles? Can you share me?"

Giles was now more than willing to do anything she asked. "I don't mind sharing."

"This is what I want, Giles. I want you and Lawrence to take me quietly in my basement while my boyfriend sleeps upstairs. He works pretty hard roofing, so he sleeps in pretty late on Saturdays." Giles went slack in his pants imagining a nail gun to the back of his head.

#

Barb fiddled with her keys. While Giles and Lawrence waited at her side door. Giles tapped Lawrence on the shoulder and mouthed, "Let's get out of here! She's got a boyfriend in there".

Lawrence loosely smiled back at him and gave him a thumbs-up. Giles wondered if Lawrence had lip-read incorrectly or if he simply didn't care.

Giles made an excuse about needing to pee and detoured into Barb's unfinished side yard. Lawrence, undaunted by Giles' warning, entered the bungalow.

Giles speed-walked all the way home. He climbed the stairs to his apartment above East End Fitness Centre and closed the door behind him. It was 9:30 a.m. and he was thankful for a warm bed to climb into.

There was a message waiting for him on his answering machine. It was Lawrence. His speech was slurry with drink, fatigue and laughter, but Giles made out that he was in Barb's basement for fifteen minutes before her boyfriend chased him out with a lacrosse stick.

"A roofer AND he plays Lacrosse," Giles remarked to himself. He wasn't ashamed or afraid. He hadn't felt he had wasted his time. He thought that the only currency that turned out to be worth anything was having stories to tell. He whispered to himself "Not bad for seventy on a Friday night. Not bad at all."



Not Crying Now  
Sara Crowley

Leo is whooping across the school playground with thumping strides and leaps. He has launched himself after a smaller child who runs full pelt, squeaky with fear. I shuffle options in my mind; distract, punish, ignore. I opt for the latter and look around at other parents, smiling at nobody in particular. There's still 10 minutes to go until the teacher calls the kids in and I can escape. I twist my body as if looking for Leo then bow my head to my phone and scroll through Facebook. I have 43 "friends" with nothing to say. I dial my landline and shove the phone to my ear, listening to it ring inside my empty house.

Leo lumps towards me and I instinctively flinch, but recover quickly and sugar my voice.

"You ok, baby?"

"Muuuuuum."

"What?"

He has a booger crusting one nostril and coupled with the exertion of chase it's making him mouth breath louder than usual. I reach one arm around his neck and allow myself a brief daydream that I add my other hand and squeeze the choking life from him.

"Muuuum."

He has taken to repeating this lately. Mum, mum, muuum, muuuuuuuuum. Its sound a hot prickle.

"Yes, baby?"

The bell rings and I aim a kiss above his head and push him towards the correct line. I wait to see them file in to be sure I am truly free. I have six hours, which sounds more than it is. I picture all the six hour slots left before the holidays and there aren't many. Leo and I are going to spend hours together. Days, weeks, months, years. Time stacking up against me, stopping me swallowing. Future Leo stamps on bees and fatly demands more of everything. Future me is crying.



The Only Memory That Really Stands Out.  
Jason Hamill

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Early afternoon, its a sunny day so the room fills with light. DAVID (mid 20's) places a few slices of tomato atop of some lettuce and white bread, spreads mustard on another piece of bread making it officially a sandwich and resting it on a plate. It's been a few days sine he has shaved, he rests himself on the counter and scratches as his eyes fix on the refrigerator. There is a small card with a photo, it reads  
"In memory of AL Davis 1964 - 2019". David opens the appliance door and pulls out a carton of orange juice.

INT. BEDROOM - DAY

CYNTHIA (woman - 40s) is sitting up in bed with her back against the headboard of the frame. She stares off into nothing as DAVID walks into the room with a plate and glass in hand.

DAVID  
I hope didn't wake you, its after 12  
and thought maybe you could use  
something to eat.

David places the glass down on the nightstand and clears some room for the plate.

DAVID (CONT'D)  
There wasn't much in the fridge,  
hope you're fine with tomato and  
cheese.

CYNTHIA  
That's very sweet of you, but I  
think I'll be fine for now.

DAVID  
Well I'm going to leave it here,  
its been over a day so please try  
and have some of it.

David goes to leave.

CYNTHIA  
Could you maybe sit with me for a  
moment? I know things the past few  
days have been difficult but i  
could use the company.

David sits at the end of the bed.

CYNTHIA (CONT'D)

You really are his spitting image, not at first but as you got older, everyday you two would look more and more alike.

DAVID

Uncle Dennis says he's got some old home videos of them lying around. I'm going to go by tomorrow afternoon and pick up a dvd from him.

CYNTHIA

I swear only when someone dies can that man actually do something nice for anyone other than himself.

They both let out a soft laugh. - Camera now holds on Cynthia. (Slow push)

CYNTHIA (CONT'D)

It's funny, i've know that man 30 years and try as I might I can't even remember how we met. I've been scouring my brain for the past couple of days and yet, nothing.

She takes a breath.

CYNTHIA (CONT'D)

The only thing that comes to mind, is the time that man got food poisoning when we lived above the rainbow cafe. I was newly pregnant with you at the time, and we were spending the weekend painting our dumpy apartment. God only knows why we didn't just move.

(BEAT)

CYNTHIA (CONT'D)

One second he was rolling primer on the wall and the next he was running down the hall. Christ it was like he had seen a ghost and in young Cynthia fashion I couldn't just let him be sick own his own. so I rushed right after him completely unaware that he threw up in the hallway and I fell flat on my back.

(MORE)

CYNTHIA (CONT'D)

(laughing) At the time i was more concerned about laying in vomit to even think whether or not I had injured myself. And the fool your father was, leaped off the toilet, pants still around his ankles, falling flat on his face. And here we are, on the bathroom floor, just and absolute mess and his face. My god. So much blood, I'm honestly surprised at the time he didn't break his nose.

Cynthia takes a beat.

CYNTHIA (CONT'D)

We just laid there for minute and looked at one another, miserable and somehow happy at the same time, and despite all that me and that man went through this is the memory that comes to mind. Just this disgusting mess, just covered in puke, blood, shit, staring up from that tile floor. I didn't know it at the time, but I think that was the moment I knew he was the one. My shit and blood covered prince charming.

David throws up off to the side of the bed.

CYNTHIA (CONT'D)

You know, i wouldn't trade that moment for anything in the world.

CUT TO BLACK.

"Overdoses"

Melinda Ulmer

You were like a party favour; Never free and never without consequence.  
But at the time, the high seemed worth the risk;  
After my last overdose, I finally learned to say no to the dealer.

PUB CRAWL  
Jim Robb

*Verbatim transcript of witness statement from Jeremy Smith in  
the matter of the suspicious death at Finnegan's Pub on the evening  
of 8 October 2016*

Sometime after the fifth bar, or maybe it was the sixth, I  
knew something wasn't right.

Me and my buddies have been on every Zombie Pub Crawl since  
the first one -- well, except for Jeff; he couldn't enter the  
first one because everybody gets ID'd. We never came close to  
finishing that first one, but even back then we all made it past  
the sixth bar. So I knew something was going on when I saw Paul  
wasn't with us any more -- like, no way he would have dropped out  
that early -- so we all started to look for him.

The Crawl is on the second Saturday in October, close enough  
to the 31st to be a Hallowe'en thing, but early enough so there's  
no ice and snow on the ground. Ice and snow aren't good on a pub  
crawl; it's hard enough to walk as it is, close to the end. This  
year it was the 8th, which is the earliest it can be, but even so  
it was pretty dark out by that time. Besides, I couldn't remember  
what Paul's costume looked like, and every zombie costume looks  
pretty much the same anyway after the fifth or sixth bar. So I had

to look real close at everyone to see whether it was Paul, and that's maybe why I noticed this guy.

His clothes were all torn up and dirty and covered with what looked like blood stains, and his face was pretty messed up, and he had the zombie walk down real good. But what really got me was that he was carrying part of an arm, with Paul's fancy Rolex on it.

We don't get too many zombies out this way. Like, I'm pretty sure we've never gotten a real zombie out here before, not ever. At the time I didn't even know for sure if there was such a thing as a real zombie. Still, me and my buddies decided that maybe, just maybe, this guy was the real deal. The thing was, we didn't know how we could find out for sure. Then Jeff remembered that in the movies you always see zombies eating, but you never see them drinking.

So when we got to the next bar we crowded around him and pushed him in. We got our beers, plus one for zombie guy, and when we all drank up, sure enough, he didn't. So the guys grabbed him, and Jeff held his mouth open while I poured the beer down his throat.

He shook us off, but he kept on shaking. Then he fell on the floor, shaking and screeching, with smoke coming out his mouth and nose and, well, like everywhere else, and after a minute he just

sort of burned up from the inside out. It wasn't pretty, but we weren't too shook up about it after what he did to Paul.

Besides, it served him right. You shouldn't go on a pub crawl if you can't handle your beer.

*End of witness statement*

END

Sleep  
Darryl Peters

Pastel over pastel,  
Twilight stains the skyline  
and I'm waiting for you.

Did the Sun steal away  
with you? Your hands entwined  
running to tomorrow?

Used ashtray, cracked glass skies:  
sing nocturnes, harsh Midnight,  
through pillows pressed to ears.

The moon's expressionless.  
His face betrays nothing  
of where you've spent the night.

Behind light pollution,  
faerie-fires of starlight  
cannot guide you homeward.

Pace this jail-cell brain, blood;  
Bee's wings beat this mad heart  
That's vibrating these sheets

Dawn sky's a cut citrus,  
Arranged in a bowl when  
You show up, too late now.

We plan for tomorrow,  
Meaningless promises  
Over morning coffee.







The Structure  
Drew Nicks

“...And that’s what they say about the old Douglas Place.”

“Fuck, Henry, if I have to hear that damn story one more time, I’ll blow my brains out.”

A contagious laugh filled the dingy bar, accompanied by the loud sound of back slaps. Chubby’s Bar was a lonely little outpost alongside the TransCanada Highway. A watering hole for the constant traveler. Many folks wouldn’t give the bar a second glance. A lone lighthouse surrounded by an ocean of nothingness. Tonight would bring something different.

Roy and his friends had pulled into the bar on more of a whim. The trio had spent most of the evening cruising along back roads and generally being obnoxious assholes. What else was a trio of twenty-something’s to do on a dull summer night? The other two, Travis and Dennis, weren’t employed and, even if they had been, their behavior wouldn’t keep them employed for long. Even as they waited for the next round as calmly as possible, their sloppy nature crept forth. Roy looked disgustedly at the spit bubbles forming at the edge of Dennis’ mouth. Roy was different, or at least he thought he was. He was a man looking for adventure. A man of action. A man of excitement. He ran a hand through his bleached blond hair, stood, and approached the bar.

Henry and his friends were still laughing when the odd looking young ‘un approached them.

“Evening gents,” said Roy in a friendly tone. “What’s this Douglas place you folks were talking about?”

Joviality around the bar died. Henry looked at Roy coldly.

“Some folks,” started Henry. “Don’t much care for being eavesdropped on. Some places, it’s a good way to get your lights punched out.”

Roy put up his hands in submission.

“Whoa, whoa young fella! I didn’t mean any offense. You see, my friends and I are just doing some sightseeing and that sounds like just the place we’d like to see.”

Henry leaned back on his stool to get a good look at Roy’s cohorts. Travis and Dennis were up to their usual exploits when they became bored. Travis was stuffing Cheetos up his nose while Dennis played a pitiful game of five finger filet with a butter knife. Henry chuckled under his breath.

“Some mighty bright friends you got there,” Henry said. He prodded the toothless coot beside him and gestured towards the two idiots at the table. Henry’s compatriot laughed.

Roy’s cool began to falter. He breathed deeply to reestablish his calm.

“While they may not look bright,” retorted Roy, “they’re damn good guys.”

Roy then heard a yelp from the table. He turned and saw Dennis cradling his hand. A fresh welt from the butter knife gleamed red on the back of his right hand.

Moron, thought Roy.

He turned back to Henry and began:

“I feel like we got off on the wrong foot. How’s about I buy you guys a round? In fact...”

Roy looked around the barroom. Aged banners clung to the walls announcing victories long past. Taxidermied pike and trout were attached to the walls. They had clearly

not been moved or cleaned in years, if not decades. Yellow and brown cobwebs hung ironically from their dead mouths. The biggest customer in the bar though was the thoroughly deteriorated mount of a moose. Most of the fur had rotted away and the glass eyes had become discoloured with the passage of time. Besides the trophy animals, the bar was deserted but for the two groups of friends.

“...How’s about I buy the house a round?”

Tension in the air dissipated like a fart in the wind. Soon the two groups colluded and began to share laughs.

One hundred and eighty five dollars and promises to help Henry during the harvesting season later, Roy had all the info about the Douglas farmstead he could ever need. Not that it all mattered much to him. Roy and his boys were far more interested in having a good time and wrecking things than any sort of local superstition or history.

It took far more cajoling and friendliness to get Henry to reveal the location of the farm than Roy had expected. He’d be eating bologna for the next few weeks. The old timer had revealed it under the pretense that Roy and his morons didn’t go there the following night.

“...That’s when the children come.”

Stupid old bastard!

It was nine PM on June 21<sup>st</sup> and Roy, with the boys, sped down the grid road leading to the old Douglas farm.

The sun loomed low on the horizon, bathing the countryside in a warming orange glow. The scene was almost like a postcard.

Travis leaned out the passenger side window and sprayed puke down the red paint job. He followed it with a half empty bottle of Pilsner, which sailed in a high arc directly into a muddy slough.

A bend formed in the road and Roy saw the farmstead in its silhouetted glory. The area was larger than he anticipated. A dilapidated house sat on the west side of the property. The yellow paint had faded and peeled. The eavestrough had detached from the edge of the roof. It leaned out into the overgrown yard like an accusatory finger.

In the middle of the property, an old barn leaned toward the horizon precariously. Its aged wood showed paint flecks which suggested it had once been coloured red. Now, the dry boards were mostly the color of the moss and fungus which called the planks home. In the uppermost window frame, gazing out on the countryside, the moldy remnants of a hangman’s noose danced in the gentle breeze.

On the eastside of the property sat the structure the farm had become infamous for. The elaborately constructed circle caught the last rays of the sun in its western most doorway. Henry hadn’t been kidding about the weird feeling the architecture. With walls nearly twenty feet high, it was hard to imagine one man had built it with ingenuity and bare hands. Henry said when old Mr. Douglas had started building his circle that all the children had been frightened of it. That feeling still lingered to this day.

The car slowed to a halt amongst the crab grass, dandelions, and cattails. Roy was the first one out of the car. Dead vegetation crunched beneath his feet. Travis and Dennis rolled out of their separate positions. Both flopped about like fish out of water. Roy began to think letting them start drinking at noon may not have been a good idea.

Roy was mesmerized by the atmosphere of the place. He could hear neither insects nor the normally present call of birds. A sphere of silence seemed to encapsulate the property. He looked about the ground, and barring the trash he called his friends, not a single piece of litter lay anywhere. No candy wrappers, beer cans, or newspapers.

Roy made his way towards the house with his two companions stumbling behind. The sun gave off its final light, illuminating the interior of the house with a warm orange shade before dipping below the horizon and leaving the world in darkness. The cement of the front stoop had cracked and split from years of exposure to the elements, yet no weeds had taken root. Roy didn't pay much attention to this detail. No, what Roy noticed was all the windows remained intact. A very rare sight on the prairies. Almost all abandoned properties fall victim to young male vandals and their need to break things.

The front door was unlocked, which was unsurprising. Judging from the rot on the wood, Roy figured he could put his fist through it like so much Jell-O. When they stepped in, the overwhelming scent of mildew assailed them. Rugs clung to the old hardwood floor like leeches. Very desiccated leeches, but leeches nonetheless. The entrance rug split into chunks when Roy's foot touched it. The five individual pieces took on unusual shapes. One perfectly spherical. Another resembled the caricature of a child, complete with oversized lollipop and toy truck. The other three were harder to define. Roy didn't wish to pontificate to his drunken friends. They moved further in.

The living room was a relic from the past. Two wing back chairs flanked the picture window. Their pattern was indistinct in the shadows so Roy withdrew his cell phone and clicked on the flashlight. Just like grandma's house. The chairs were once fuchsia with strange floral patterns. He expected to find plastic covers on them when he reached to touch with his long fingers. They weren't there. The aged upholstery came off in his hand like a second skin.

Travis couldn't take the silence any longer. He lifted one of the moldered chairs and threw it through the window. He unleashed a howl of relief. Dennis clapped in appreciation.

"What the fuck did you do that for?" asked Roy, turning sharply to face his friend.

"Needed to be broke," was the reply.

Roy felt disgust rising in him. He couldn't figure out why. Were this any other place, he would've done the same. But something about this property prevented him from reveling in its destruction. A cool chill crept through the new aperture and sent shivers up Roy's spine.

Outside, a kestrel screeched and Roy jumped. Travis and Dennis seemed less perturbed. They continued to stare out the broken window. Roy turned and motioned for the others to follow.

When they had returned to the main foyer, their eyes were drawn to the staircase leading to the upper floor. Roy thought it unwise to ascend. Some voice in his head said it would be foolhardy and dangerous to check the inner sanctum. He led the two clearly disappointed vandals back out of the house and into the cool night air.

The trio looked at the moving crabgrass and cattails. The wind had died. Roy felt more chills traverse the length of his spine. He wasn't sure what was about to emerge from the vegetation but, judging from the size and sway, it wasn't a coyote or gopher. When the creature presented itself, Roy was shocked.

The child couldn't have been older than eight or nine. He crawled on hands and knees in a filthy set of denim overalls. His dirty blond hair shone in the pale moonlight. Roy

nearly called out to the little boy when he stopped himself. The little boy was followed by five more of similarly indeterminate age. Three of them were little girls.

"What the fuck is this?!" Dennis called. "You little shits! What the hell are you doing?"

The children completely ignored the trio and moved in a line to the east, towards the structure. When Roy glanced over to the mammoth structure, his mouth went dry.

A bonfire had been built in its center. Flames danced high above the other children's heads. Yes, there are more, he noted. Six other children stood at the structure's center. Three small bodies used blankets to fan the flames. The other three danced with streamers in their hands. Roy saw that the other three were also girls.

Though he knew he shouldn't, Roy led his group over to the structure. The heat was intense and they crouched low to shield themselves and watch.

All of the children danced and swayed to unheard music. They flew their streamers in the air as high as their arms could reach. They chanted in a strange tongue. When they began to disrobe, Roy felt the urge to flee. He could not. The sight so transfixed him that his feet refused to move. He could only watch the orange flames lick skyward.

Travis and Dennis were not held by this strange paralysis. They stood and walked towards the ritual. Roy wanted to call out. To stop them. He feared they did not see the twisted, menacing face in the flames.

Travis and Dennis entered the circle and immediately started to hassle the kids. The children didn't seem to notice the two morons but the face in the flames did. It stared with malice upon the two intruders. Travis pushed one of the kids and, in an instant, he and Dennis rose high in the air as though pulled by marionette strings. They looked about at the magic occurring around them. Roy looked on in horror. His horror only rose with what occurred next. Before his very eyes, Travis completely vanished from existence. Dennis' fate was far more painful. Dennis screamed as one of his shoulders was dislocated by an unseen force. His screech reached fever pitch when the arm was wrenched from his body. Steaming blood rained down on the entranced children.

Roy screamed uncontrollably. The next few minutes were a complete blur. He didn't remember running for the car. Didn't remember tearing out of the property like a madman. All he remembered was stopping on the side of the road and passing out when he felt safe.

Roy's final two weeks were paranoid. Sleep evaded him. Children terrified him and everywhere he went, he was followed by that face in the flames. When he finally put the gun in his mouth, closed his eyes, and pulled the trigger, he thought peace would greet him. He instead met that face in the flames and knew his suffering would be eternal.

## STILL

Timothy Tarkelly

You're visiting and so you see  
the friend who is left, still  
in the tired town  
you run from, still  
wearing the same blue  
corporate logo smock, still  
here.

"You look great, man,"  
he says, he climbs in and you make  
familiar circles -- the teenager  
routes of main street, country roads,  
and the parking lot where you fell  
in love and into the wrong crowds. Still,

there are people,  
new kids drinking  
in pickup beds and swapping  
keys and stories (lies) to get them  
closer to adulthood.

You watch, shake your head,  
remembering how dumb  
you were.  
He sighs, still  
wishing he were one of them.

Beer is in order  
and your old bar hasn't updated  
since W., but the faces are older,  
tired, looking at you.

"You look like shit," you don't say.  
You nod at his (non) stories  
and pay the tab, still  
guilty for ever leaving, and always  
waiting to get the hell out of there.

"Tattered Blanket"

Melinda Ulmer

Musty, tattered throw blanket; You used to bring life and comfort.

Vibrant blue and gold woven patterns of sunshine and moonlight brought warmth  
wherever you would lay.

She recycled you to me - A gift I still cherish.

But now I see your worn, faded, frailness and wonder

how much longer I have to hold on to you, since I no longer have her to hold me.







The West

Brian D.

To the west I've been.

The real West, not Calgary. That's West central Canada with an attitude.

I mean the West, where giant sentinels of granite look over you the way they did every ebb and flow of civilization that's ever been, with breathtaking ancient timber reaching to the sun from the sides of each rocky mammoth. Rivers still flow here in February, out running mother nature's frosty winter grip.

Wildlife is born into this tundra, and if you venture deep enough you might come across a critter or two that has never seen a two legged animal before. The ocean rushes to the shore, almost as excited as you are to be resting upon a beach of rock and years old driftwood.

That's what the West was.

With The Utmost Reverence  
Mark Fenton

I wove my way through the throngs of ancients gathering for breakfast at Morgan's Point Retirement Home, dodging walkers, wheelchairs, and the occasional geriatric freight train bulldozing their way to the dining room. Staff darted here and there, navigating the traffic, serving breakfast, pouring drinks, and dispensing tiny paper cups of medication. Nametags assigned the seats at each table, though many sat vacant; not everyone arose for breakfast. Some, occasionally, would never rise again.

A large man in a wheelchair sat parked against the wall next to a vacant table at the far corner of the dining room, head tilted back, eyes closed and gently snoring. I slid into a seat at the table next to a window. Snow fell gently outside, and a group of teenagers pelted each other with snowballs in a nearby field.

"We've missed you around here."

I turned to the source of the familiar voice, a woman with a carafe in each hand.

"Hi Jo," I smiled. "Good to see you."

"Good morning Andy," she said cheerily to my father. She filled Dad's coffee cup then looked at me. "Coffee or tea for you?"

"No thanks."

My father straightened in his wheelchair, his eyes fluttering open before locking on mine.

"Morning Dad," I said. "I came to join you for breakfast before I leave."

"What would you like for breakfast Andy?" Jo asked.

My father looked at her, not quite seeming to comprehend. He looked over at me the same way. Not blank. Confused? I couldn't tell for sure. He shook his head slightly. A moment of silence.

"I don't know," he said softly, almost incomprehensible.

"How about some oatmeal Andy?"

I'm sure it's in the staff's manual to always use the residents names. Some of them need reminders.

Dad nodded slightly and Jo disappeared, returning a few minutes later with a small bowl of oatmeal, toast and half banana before hustling off again.

I guess I'd fallen out of favour. She used to make up a breakfast for me too.

"Eggs over medium, beans, whole wheat toast and bacon for you Dave," I heard behind me. "And chocolate milk."

I stood up as Melanie set my breakfast in front of me. "Hey you," I smiled, got up and gave her a quick hug. "Great to see you."

"You too," she said, joining us at the table. "You've been missed."

"Aren't you supposed to be in your office managing this place?" I asked.

"Phhft." she replied. "I like it better out here." Which is why stacks of files seemed to multiply on her desk. "One kitchen server called in sick, and our nurse had a family emergency, so, I'm filling in for both of them. Stop in and see me before you leave." She disappeared into the kitchen.

Dad's shaky hand took a creamer from the bowl. A few hits and misses, but he finally opened it, pouring the contents into his coffee. I learned long ago that there were

some things you didn't do for residents of places like this. Some get lazy. The more they do for themselves, and for as long as possible, the more capable they feel.

"Did you have a good sleep?"

Dad nodded slightly, then took a nibble from his toast. This was as good as he was going to get today.

A trembling hand lifted his coffee to his lip. By some miracle, he didn't spill a drop. He managed to consume half of his oatmeal, a few sips of orange juice and half of his coffee while I ate my breakfast with him. The Toronto Star sat on the table, untouched. It'd been a few months since Dad could concentrate enough to read the paper, but we kept the ritual alive.

"Don't forget your pills," I prodded.

He raised the tiny paper cup, with its ten or so pills to his lips, dumped them in his mouth, and washed them down with a few sips of coffee. He mumbled incoherently.

"Pardon?" I asked, leaning in to hear better.

"I'm done," he croaked. "Take me back."

I rolled him to room 237; twelve feet wide, twenty feet long. He started breathing hard, grimacing.

"Dad, are you okay?"

"It hurts when I pee."

I hope I never need a catheter.

"Can I help you to your chair?"

"Bed," he whispered.

I rolled the chair beside the bed and locked the wheels, took off his shoes, and removed the foot supports from the wheelchair.

He grunted and groaned loudly as we got him to his feet.

I really should have had one of the other staff help me. Five foot eight, and two hundred and fifty pounds, he was a bit of a chore. I got him standing, but had to rotate him 90 degrees before he could sit down on the bed.

"How the hell did I get so crippled and useless so quickly?" he grunted. Rhetorically I hoped. I didn't want to answer that one.

We shuffled him around till his back was to the bed, then he folded his legs without warning, turning what should have been a soft landing into a barely controlled crash, but at least he missed the bed rail.

I got him settled in and comfortable, then took his call button from its charger and fastened it next to his head.

"I have to go now Dad," I told him. "I'll see you next time."

He nodded and I gave him a kiss on the forehead.

"Remember, if you need to get out of bed, push the button and someone will come and help you. Do not try to get up by yourself."

The old man nodded and closed his eyes. Five seconds and he was dead to the world. Probably not the best expression in this case. He'd fallen into a deep sleep. I probably should have had him take his teeth out first.

I sat in Dad's easy chair and looked around the room. Eighty-four years old and living in two hundred and forty square feet. I could count the items he had left. A hospital bed, a chair, a small dresser holding his television. A mini fridge. The closet held the few

clothes he needed, though my sister Gina stored the rest of his wardrobe at her house. The bathroom occupied the corner next to the door.

In the bell curve of life you start with nothing. You accumulate people and “stuff.” Friends, a spouse, kids, cars, a house, money and toys before you peak. Then slowly, piece by piece, you lose it all.

There are the lucky ones of course. Dad’s older brother lived a good life. He and my aunt still had all of their marbles and lived in their own house till the end. He always had a new car. One day, he sat down in his chair on the porch, fell asleep, and never woke up. She died two days later. They were ninety-three.

This building contained the others; those like my father. My mother’s golden years had been better than Dad’s in some ways, worse in others. When his mobility issues forced them to move from into a retirement home, she continued her favourite pastime, which was a cheerfully sadistic torment of my father, and, anyone else around her for that matter. She never really had any filters, and anything she thought, good or bad, Edna said. Truth was that few of us would have visited at all if it weren’t for Dad. We sure as hell didn’t enjoy her company.

The staff and facility here provide a full range of services to their clientele. “Andy loves it here,” Edna told a family gathering in the lounge. “They even wash his dick and wipe his ass.” The sight of Dad shrinking into his chair to the horrified looks of family, friends and even total strangers in the room haunts me to this day.

But, the rip in her marble bag grew, till one by one, the marbles rolled out. “She’s battier than Carlsbad Caverns,” Dad said. In Mom’s last year at Morgan’s Point, Dad rarely left their room except for meals. He always feared leaving her alone, unsure of what trouble she’d get into. She was two patties short of a Big Mac, but physically, she was still able, and could cover a lot of ground very quickly. We moved her to another facility just over a year ago, and she passed away five months later.

Dad’s life began anew after she left. Free of his self-imposed confinement, he got out to more of the activities, and socialized with the other inmates, (oops, sorry, we’re supposed to call them residents). Just a few months ago he walked on his own, joked and laughed, and loved reading, watching television, and playing games. Then, what started as a minor cold turned into a lung infection and a month-long hospital stay. Dad’s capabilities dropped several notches.

I left the room to seek out Melanie. I’d almost reached her office when I encountered a murder of old crows in the front reception area.

“You Andy’s son?” one asked.

“I am,” I smiled.

“You tell him we want him back at the poker game!” another ordered.

“We’re hoping he’ll be back to playing poker and Bingo soon,” I replied.

“Screw the damn Bingo!” the first crow shot back. “Poker! That’s where we need Andy.”

“I’ll let him know you’re waiting for him,” I promised.

My rescuer rounded the corner.

“These ladies giving you a hard time?” Melanie inquired.

“Not really any of your beeswax if we were!” another crow shot back, sparkling mischief in her eyes.

“Not bothering me at all,” I said.

"Let's walk," Mel suggested. "Stay out of trouble ladies!"

"Sounds like dad's got quite the fan club here," I observed once clear of the local gang.

"More like a harem than a fan club," Melanie laughed. "Andy's quite the charmer."

"Always has been," I stated. An unbidden image flashed through my mind of Dad and his harem gathered around a table playing strip poker. I shuddered slightly. "As long as they're only playing for chips or money."

Melanie laughed so hard she snorted. "You wouldn't believe the situations my staff walk in on. They're old, but they're not dead. Our pharmacy dispenses its fair share of Viagra."

I suppose many of us are guilty of thinking of the elderly as being past their days of thrills and excitement. But dreams, fantasies, and mischievousness don't always disappear with age. We reached her office and she ushered me in.

"What a difference a few months make," I prompted.

"A big difference in Andy's case," she said. "Some days will be better than others, but you know where he's heading."

I nodded. My sisters and I had discussed dad's condition and 'post-departure planning'. "Lucy and Gina gave me the full update," I confirmed. "Spots on his lungs and a few other areas, and his liver's pretty much packed it in. Any idea how long he might have left?"

Mel shrugged. "How long do any of us have? Weeks? Months? He may see Easter. Maybe even summer. But he's passed his last Christmas."

"With his new hip and knee, and his pacemaker pretty much still under warranty, I figured there wasn't much more to knock him down," I commented. "But anyone who knows Dad won't be surprised that his liver had hit its Best Before Date. The only surprise is that it didn't explode years ago from a lifetime of abuse."

"And it hasn't helped that his brother keeps sneaking bottles of Canadian Club in to him," Mel stated. "We'll take good care of him as long as we can, though."

"I know you will," I acknowledged, getting up from my chair. "I had a good visit with him. I'll see you again in May, if not before."

Nine days later, my phone rang back in Moose Jaw just after ten p.m. with my sister Lucy's name showed on the call display. It was two hours later in her time zone, so I knew why she was calling, or at least, I thought I did.

"I think Dad's dead," she said.

"Um, what the hell do you mean you think he's dead?"

"Well, Gina just called me and she thinks dad's dead."

"Well, could you find out for sure and call me back!" It was one of those subjects that needed a definitive statement.

Another call a short while later, confirming that my father had peacefully made the voyage to The Great Beyond.

I called my youngest daughter Dani right away, with a caution not to spread the word just yet. My job was to make the phone calls to key family members first thing in the morning to inform them as quickly as possible. There's nothing worse than some idiot posting about the death of a family member on Facebook before the important people are informed. Such idiots exist in many families.

My other daughter, Terri, lives in China teaching English, so I called her on Skype and broke the news.

"Are you okay Dad?" she asked. "Are you flying back to Ontario right away?"

"I'm fine thanks, but I'm not flying out," I replied. "He's being cremated tomorrow, and we'll be having a service for him in May."

She covered her mouth with her hand, her head kind of spasming. At first I thought she was crying.

"You're laughing!" I accused.

"Yes!" she acknowledged, "And it's your fault! As soon as you said Grampa was being cremated. You know the story!"

I chuckled. "Oh. Yeah. That."

The generally held view is that cremation isn't supposed to be funny, so about twenty years earlier, when my father's departure plan unexpectedly came up, not everyone appreciated my response.

"We went to the lawyer's office today to update our wills and funeral plans," my mother stated. "Did you know your father wants to be cremated?"

The statement caught me off guard, since we were in the middle of a card game, it was my deal, and tossing dad into the oven was about the furthest thing from my mind.

"Really?" I looked at my father.

My wife Bev opened with her two sets of four. "It's a lot more common these days," she chimes in.

"Well not for me!" my mother insisted.

Dad took a drink of his lightly diluted Canadian Club, not responding. My mother had a habit of getting her way; some described my father as whipped, but I hoped that he would at least have a say in his final sendoff.

"Dad, have you thought about this?" I asked seriously.

My father dropped a nickel into the bowl and drew three cards off the deck. He had to reach further than the rest of us due to his oversized belly. Okay, truth be told, he was fat.

"Sure," he said. "Got it all worked out."

I thought about it for a second. "Don't you realize how dangerous cremation is?" I asked. "How many people could get hurt?"

He raised an eyebrow in my direction. "What the hell are you talking about?" His patience on this subject had grown thinner than rice paper.

"Dad, I was barbequing a pork roast the other day, and left it on the spit unattended longer than I should have," I explained in my gravest tone. "Have you ever seen a fat fire get out of control? The thick, black smoke was awful, the flames...my God it was an inferno! Nothing left but a crispy piece of coal. We're lucky no bystanders were hurt! I could have asphyxiated the entire neighbourhood!"

My mother gasped in horror. "David!" she said sharply. "That's a horrible thing to say to your father!"

I looked over at Dad, vibrating silently in his chair, his beet red face made me wonder if we'd be stoking the furnace sooner than later. Then, he roared, loud and long. I don't think my father had ever laughed so hard in his life.

\* \* \* \* \*

Burial day came, and at my Uncle Ron's suggestion, we dropped a forty-ouncer of CC down the hole on top of the urn to keep Dad warm on cold nights. Father Leo did a nice, short, non-religious send off at graveside.

At the reception afterwards, complete with roast pork in the cold cuts, my sisters volunteered me to say a few words of thanks to everyone for coming out and joining us to say farewell to Dad. Uncle Ron came up to me right afterwards.

"Is this where we take the microphone and take turns roasting him?" he asked.

"He's already roasted," Bev retorted. "That's how he got in the jar."

Mixed reactions of delight and horror from those within earshot, which I added to by relating the Barbeque Story. That evening, a few of us kicked off our shoes to relax at Gina's place.

"So, um, not to be morbid or anything," Lucy said, "but Dad just got a new knee and an artificial hip last year. Would they have burned up too? I know they have to take out breast implants because they explode in the fire."

"Not to mention his pacemaker just got a new battery," Gina added.

"Nah that stuff wouldn't have burned up," I said. "They'd have to sift that out before the ashes went into the urn."

"So what do they do with the spare parts that didn't burn up?" Lucy asked. "Is there a store somewhere with used artificial knees and hips?"

"Might be," I mused. "And discounted pacemakers. Hardly used, only slightly scorched. Pick up your pacemaker at a discount here, all sales final."

"They should still be under warranty," Gina added.

The room went silent for a moment, then I started laughing, then the rest joined in. Such is our family. We toasted our father and knew that somewhere, he wasn't just laughing with us, he was laughing at us.

The playground where they met was the only one Emma knew in the area. She'd visited with her sister a couple of times, eaten haribo on the swings, hammered up the yellow stairs to the grey slide.

Joe was curled in the space under the yellow stairs, sat on his Metallica hoodie. The floor underneath was recycled rubber tyres chopped into something both rough and smooth. Emma thought he was smoking at first, he had his hand near his face in a certain way and his breath was a grey tongue flicking out.

"Hey!" Emma said, not in greeting but admonishment. But as she leaned to sit she saw he'd been biting his thumbnail, not smoking, and his breath was because of the cold, that was all.

"Hey," Joe said, forehead wrinkling. "You OK?"

"Yep."

"Was your dad OK about you coming out?"

"Step-dad." He hadn't been OK with her coming out. Not at all. Emma shook her head. "Did you get them?"

In response Joe produced a tiny translucent bag, four grey pills inside like eggs in a belly. They had something stamped onto them, or maybe carved into them, Joe's hand was moving too quickly for her to make it out. The bag was small, micro. *Who makes these bags*, Emma thought, *do they care that they are only ever used for this one seedy thing?*

"Thought we could take one at first, see what they're like, then another if we need it," Joe said. "They're really good, apparently. He said we wouldn't need two."

"Whatever," Emma said.

Rain was bouncing off the play equipment above as the light faded. The noise reminded Emma of being small and safe. She closed her eyes, enjoying the moment, but the wind-carried call of someone furious interrupted.

"Is someone shouting?" Joe asked, all bovine stupidity.

"Shh," Emma said.

Her stepdad's voice, quivering with aggression, was calling her name. She realised, as she sat and listened to her name being yelled, that he must have followed her here, that he would drag her home using whatever means necessary, that her few hours of snatched freedom was a personal affront to him.

"Shh, shh," Emma said, the way she might say to a fractious child and Joe gripped her hand, rubbing her palm with his thumb.

The shouting grew fainter, until the sound of the rain was dominant. Emma reached forwards and tugged the packet out of Joe's fist, her fingers scraping against his damp skin. She dug her fingers into the plastic pouch, and scooped out two pills, lifting them off her finger with her lips. They tasted like talc.

Emma passed the package back to Joe. "Let's go," she said, and she laughed. She laughed so hard and for so long Joe's face became tight and closed, but she didn't stop.



[Sitting on a] **Secret Phrase:**  
**Drag Race Edition**

Search the grid for the words below. When they have all been found, the remaining letters will spell a secret phrase!

A	F	T	R	O	P	N	E	V	A	D	M	T
L	L	H	S	D	R	A	W	D	E	I	O	A
E	A	Y	A	B	O	B	L	I	C	D	K	I
D	Z	V	S	G	A	R	D	H	R	E	I	A
J	E	I	H	S	A	I	E	I	R	S	E	L
N	D	A	A	E	A	L	C	U	L	F	I	E
I	A	D	P	D	L	K	E	L	A	P	J	G
M	X	O	T	E	D	C	A	R	S	O	N	N
R	A	R	K	L	I	M	R	Y	A	J	A	A
E	K	E	E	R	S	A	N	I	N	A	V	H
G	S	E	T	I	H	C	M	I	K	E	E	S
N	A	A	M	O	E	N	E	L	A	Y	O	R
I	L	O	R	U	P	A	U	L	C	H	A	D
G	A	Y	T	A	K	I	T	E	L	O	I	V
N	O	R	A	H	S	B	E	I	X	I	R	T

ADORE	EDWARDS	NINA
AJA	EUREKA	PEARL
ALASKA	FARRAH	ROYALE
ALYSSA	FLAZEDA	RUPAUL
BIANCA	GINGERMINJ	SASHA
BOB	IVY	SHANGELA
CARSON	KATYA	SHARON
CHAD	KIMCHI	TODRICK
DAVENPORT	LATRICE	TRIXIE
DELA	LIPSYNC	VANJIE
DELRIO	MICHELLE	VIOLET
DETOX	MILK	
DRAG	NAOMISMALLS	



