



# Jersey Devil Press

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# **Jersey Devil Press**

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## **Editor's Note: Love is a Many Splendored Thing**

In our ongoing efforts to accidentally come up with themes at the most inappropriate times, we are proud to present Issue Fourteen of Jersey Devil Press, dedicated to that most wonderful and terrible of all emotions: Love.

That's right. In the dead of autumn, just in time for Halloween, we've got a bunch of stories about the most pink and frilly of feelings. Or is it? After reading these five stories, I'm not so sure.

The authors here get love down in all its messy glory: the selflessness and the selfishness; the pain, the passion, the effort and the ease; the wonder and, especially, the unexpectedness of it all.

The first stop on this textual Tunnel of Love is Hilary Gan's remarkable debut story, "The Pragmatist," followed by "The Ballad of Done Me Wrong and Maybegirl," by the enigmatic Sandra Bazzarelli. Next is the moving "The Rodeo Clown" by the prolific Annam Manthiram, then Michael Frissore's "The Seven Stages of Sorrow," equal parts beautiful and trippy. Then the ride brings us ashore, into a dirty fever dream of life in Brooklyn, as presented by the magnificent Chloe Caldwell in "That Was Called Love."

There's truth and heartbreak in these tales, as well as Chicken McNuggets and ninjas. If that's not love, then I don't know what is.

– Eirik Gumeny

# The Pragmatist

Hilary Gan

When Death, black-haired and looking rather ridiculously like Tom Selleck, climbed through the bedroom window, Ayesha was on top of the quilt turning the electronic pages of her Kindle through the newest Janet Evanovich. Death raised a hand in greeting and flicked his cigarette out the window. The ember traced his own trajectory through the night.

"Weren't you in my mom's hospital room last month?" she asked him.

"Yeah," Death said. "Sorry to see you again so soon."

"Do you mind if I just finish this chapter?"

"That's how you elect to spend your final minutes?"

Ayesha shrugged. "That's what I would be doing anyway."

Death crooked the corner of his mouth.

"I'm not here for you. But I admire your attitude."

Ayesha's pulse skyrocketed and her mouth went dry.

"Oh, no."

Death went around to the other side of the bed and shook Larry, who opened a bleary eye and said, "Who are you?"

"Death," Death said, and stuck out a hand. Larry flailed his legs wildly and landed on the floor beside the bed with a thump. Death sighed and stuck his hand back in his pocket.

"Every time. No one wants to shake hands. It's like when you see someone you think you know and start to wave and then realize you don't know them and have to fix your hair instead."

"Not cool," Larry said. "*Not fucking cool.* I talked to Apollo about this. Why are you here?"

Death checked his watch. "You're about to have an aortic embolism. Well, in like ten minutes. I came early. It's policy with Olympic litigators."

“Yeah, but I talked to Apollo, and he said —”

“Nice try, buddy. Think I haven't heard that one before?”

“It's true,” Ayesha said quietly. Both their heads swiveled to look at her. “Apollo came to work in his firm as an intern after that whole mess with Delphyne, and Larry always made sure he got his Venti Caramel Macchiato. He worked it out with the Fates. If Larry can find someone else to die for him, he's exempt.”

“Oh, shit,” Death said slowly, and reached into his pocket for his cell phone. He dialed a number and it rang three times; Ayesha could hear it, faint and electronic against the wet silence of the nighttime.

“Hey, it's Death. Yeah. I have this guy here, Larry Pancio? He says—uh-huh. Yeah. Alright. Sorry, I didn't see the exemptions list yet. Dude, it's scheduled for 11:59 tonight, it should have been on last week's. I think the new guy forgot to adjust for time zones. Okay. Yeah. See you in a few.”

He hung up.

“Okay, Hermes will be here in a minute and he can totally take you around to ask people.”

Larry exhaled loudly and ran a hand through his hair.

“Thanks, Ayesha,” he said, and smiled his half-smile at her. She smiled back. Her hands shook. Larry started to hoist himself up on to the bed, but Death put his hand out in a warning and Larry froze.

“Dude, you're supposed to be sleeping. Don't exert yourself or you might trigger your embolism before we can straighten this out.”

“Oh,” Larry said. “Thanks.”

“Yeah, sure. Reversals are way more paperwork than exemptions.”

They were silent for a moment; out the open window Ayesha could hear the gutters dripping.

“Has anyone ever told you you look like Tom Selleck?” she asked.

"Yeah," he said. "Not that often, though. Usually people are crying and can't see that well. It's mostly old ladies who notice. I used to get Archimedes a lot."

There was a knock at the door. Death sauntered over and opened it, and Hermes walked in. He was tall and thin and wearing Ray-Bans.

"Dude," said Death. "What's with the sunglasses at night?"

Hermes pushed them up onto his head. His irises were golden.

"Had a meeting with Helios."

"They're pretty baller shades, though," Death said wistfully. "I'm hoping I can trade Bob Dylan ten extra minutes for his. I mean, he churned out *Blowin' in the Wind* in ten minutes, I think it's a fair trade."

Hermes turned to Larry.

"So you're our man," he said, smiling. The smile made him look like a bank teller. He picked Larry up gently and set him on his feet. "Where are we headed?"

"I guess my parents are the logical choice," Larry said, looking at Ayesha for confirmation.

"Did they, ever, you know, say they would die for you?" she asked anxiously.

"Well, not in so many words. But they're my parents. And they're old."

Hermes pulled out his iPhone and tapped the screen a few times.

"They're in Boise?"

"Yeah," Larry said. "What, do you have an app for that?"

Hermes held up the phone. "No, I'm playing Words With Friends with the Muses." He tapped his temple. "All-knowing, remember?"

He put his phone away and dropped his sunglasses back over his eyes.

"You ready?"



"Wait, will I get to come back here?" Larry asked, turning towards Ayesha. "Just in case?"

"Oh, yeah," said Death. "I'm going to hang out here. This is the departure point on file, no point moving it when Hermes is on the job. Easier to bring whoever it is back here."

"Okay," Larry said, and smiled at Ayesha again. "See you soon."

"Love you," she said.

"Love you, too."

Hermes took his elbow and they shut the door behind them. Death leaned against the dresser.

"Is it cool if I smoke in here?"

"Hey," she said, "whatever keeps you in a good mood."

"I like you," he said, packing his pack of cigarettes. "So pragmatic. Most people freak out if they have to stay in the room with me."

"Do you do exemptions a lot?"

"I mean, they're not the norm," he said, lighting his cigarette. "But the gods confer favors where they will. All-powerful and whatever."

He took a drag and exhaled a neat stream of smoke.

"Pretty cool that you guys are tight with Apollo."

"Yeah, I guess it came in handy," Ayesha said. "I didn't think we'd have to call in any favors this soon, though."

"Embolisms are nasty buggers," he said. "Can't really detect them. Vague warning signs."

Ayesha nodded and curled her knees up to her chin. She rocked a little while she tried to put her words in order, then asked, "So... is there ever any difficulty? Finding a replacement?"

Death squinted at her.

"Not usually. I've had one or two that had to go anyway. That was a fucking mess. But nah, you humans are all into that love shit. There's always someone."

Ayesha nodded.

A beep sounded from Death's pocket.

"That'll be Hermes," he said, shifting into a standing position to dig his cell phone out with the hand that wasn't holding the cigarette. He opened the phone and then frowned. "Hm."

"What?" Ayesha asked.

"I guess they said no," he said. "That's weird. Usually it's the parents who go for it. Especially if there's preexisting conditions."

"Larry's parents are pretty healthy," Ayesha said.

"Yeah, but his mom's got that—oh, shit, you guys don't know about that yet." His frown deepened. "I hope Hermes told her that. Kind of an important disclosure, given the circumstances." His free thumb tapped the phone keypad. "Then again, it might have been all too much at once. That can happen sometimes. Natural reaction, really."

Ayesha wrapped a set of fingers around each opposing wrist in a manacle grip.

"Now who can he ask?"

Death held up a finger while he finished his message, and then slid the phone back into his pocket.

"I guess his aunt was pretty close to him?"

"Right, Aunt Lisa."

"And then they said they'd try his best friend Marty."

Ayesha nodded again.

"They served together in Desert Storm."

They sat in silence again; a cricket chirped from somewhere in the house.

"It's going to have to be me, isn't it," Ayesha said, her voice scratchy.

Death looked at her shrewdly.

"Yeah. Most likely. If it's not the parents, it's the spouse."

"Will it hurt?"

"For an exemption-taker?" he guffawed. "Totally not. You'll even get a pretty nice space down there. Fruit trees and whatnot. Aphrodite has a soft spot for exemption-takers."

"Okay," she said, but then she noticed he was examining his nails.

"What's the catch, Death?" she asked, her voice too high.

"No catch," he said. "Everything'll be gravy."

"You're a rotten liar."

He sighed.

"You noticed, huh? Yeah, it comes with the job description. Fairly straightforward and all, Death is."

He grinned at her. She glared at him, and he held his hands up in defeat.

"I swear there's no pain."

"Then what is it?"

He folded his arms over his t-shirt.

"When you do this, you're giving up your self for another person. You're literally taking his place. You won't... remember anything else. Your whole being, your soul, the part that survives your body, will be dedicated to this one act."

"To love," Ayesha said fiercely.

"Yeah. To love. It's like you're sacrificing your self directly to Aphrodite. Hence, the fruit trees."

"Nectar for nectar?" Ayesha asked, smiling a little.

Death looked at her.

"This Marty guy better say yes. For a human you're really not half bad."

Death's cell phone beeped.

"Come on, one out of three." He checked the message.

"Shit. Well, one out of four ain't bad odds, either."

Ayesha sighed and put her feet over the edge of the bed.

"What are you doing? We've still got Marty."

"I know they served together and all, but Marty's kind of a bastard," she said, going over to the closet. "He wouldn't change his vacation dates for our wedding. Think I'll need a sweater?"

"Babe," he said. "It's Hades."

"Good point." She let the hanger swing back into place.

"Do you have kids? I can let you say goodbye," he offered.

"Maggie's at college out west," she said. "It'll be better if Larry tells her. If I call and say, 'Hey, I'm dying for your dad,' it won't go over well. And she might try to take his place instead."

Death nodded and said, "The anger phase goes better when you're not present for it."

Ayesha looked down at her hands.

"This is weird. Leaving for somewhere and not bringing anything with me."

He waved a hand in dismissal.

"You'll get used to it." He paused. "Are you, like, sure about this? What is Larry going to say?"

"I'm not going to let him say anything," she said. "The anger phase goes better when you're not present for it."

Death smiled slightly.

"Well, let's wait to hear about Marty, anyway. We'll have a couple getaway seconds in between."

"Okay," she said, and sat down on the bed again to wait.

After a minute in silence she said, "I never thought cell phones would be so integral in my death."

"Beats the hell out of memos, not to mention sheepskin," he said. "It's lessened Hermes' workload considerably. He gets way more tail now. Less snappy, too."

Ayesha rolled her eyes.

"Glad we could help."

Death's phone beeped; Ayesha held her breath even though she knew she shouldn't. Death cursed.

"Marty really is a bastard," he said. "How could you say no to your best friend's face like that? It's one thing to renege. This is just cold."

Ayesha stood up. Her hands trembled and her breaths came quickly but she reached out to take Death's hand.

"You sure you don't want to say goodbye?" he asked.

She smiled sadly.

"It's better if we just go."

"You know him best," he said, shrugging, and flicked his cigarette out the window again. "You ready?"

She said nothing, only placed her small, trembling dark hand in his great pale one. His fingers were cool and dry. He led her over to the window.

"Sucks, you know," he said, as she threw a leg over the sill into the damp air. "I was hoping we could hang out in Hades."

"Why can't we?" she asked.

"Honey, in about three seconds the only thing you'll be able to speak of with any coherency is Larry."

Ayesha looked up at him.

"I guess that would be bad date etiquette," she said.

"Obsessing over another guy."

"The kiss of death," he agreed, and followed her out the window.

**HILARY GAN** is a klutz who resides in Tempe, Arizona. She earned an interdisciplinary degree in biology and philosophy from Arizona State University, where she also studied creative writing under Ron Carlson. He taught her that fact has nothing to do with truth and that even eating should be secondary to writing.

# The Ballad of Done Me Wrong and Maybegirl

Sandra Bazzarelli

A long-suffering white rapper, Mitchell Dunn changed his name to Done Me Wrong and got a record deal. His rhymes were, well, they rhymed, but overall he was more of a pin-up boy with a gravelly voice and uneasy smile than a highly esteemed wordsmith. That is, until he met Maybegirl.

Maybegirl was a poet. Maybegirl got her name because she looked neither male nor female. Truthfully, the name Maybeboy could have just as easily stuck. But Maybegirl was the name that rolled off the tongues of her tormentors most efficiently. Some guys in the projects teased her, beat her up sometimes for being what they perceived to be a lesbian. But Maybegirl, tucked inside her baggy clothes, baseball cap, and general hip hop gear, wasn't a lesbian. Maybegirl was just trying to hide.

Depending on the day, Maybegirl could have up to fifteen poems scrawled on her skin in black ink. The ones she didn't like she washed off in the shower at night. The ones she did like she traced into herself with the slim pink box cutter that had come in some kiddie pencil case she bought at the local dollar store.

While in the city promoting his latest CD, Done Me Wrong made an uncharacteristic stop at the McDonald's of his youth. As a kid he had frequented the very same McDonald's because, as a kid, Done Me Wrong had been absolutely fat. The kind of fat only parental neglect and fast food could inspire. Instead of going to school, Done Me Wrong would ride his bike over the bridge and into the city. He'd meet up with a bunch of young wannabe graffiti artists and break dancers who spent the bulk of their school days underground, riding the subway and talking about hip hop. Not one of them had any real talent for anything hip hop related, but

they had passion and plenty of time on their hands. Time that was, of course, afforded to them thanks to the lack of adult interest and guidance in their lives. Still, one of them, Rudy Heart, perhaps the biggest hip hop fan of their adolescent group, managed to maintain a full brain's worth of imagination and business savvy to make use of all that extra time they had.

Rudy Heart did not fail to notice that his friend, Mitchell Dunn, at only fourteen, already had a presence. He had a quality about him that went far beyond the cloud of tobacco smoke that trailed him. The husky voice that hugged his words managed to transform his soft blue-eyed gaze into a cold menacing stare. Anything he said had an inherent, yet unsettling authority to it. Like a cop. But a filthy one.

"Listen," he said to Mitchell one afternoon as they devoured French fries by the handful, "I think you could probably rap. Maybe you could be an MC or something. I could be your manager. We could develop you as an artist who has something original to say and then you could just, you know, say it."

The rest of the group laughed and threw French fries at Rudy Heart.

"He's too fuckin' fat, yo," one remarked.

"Yeah, man," said another. "Plus, I ain't never heard him spit. Not a word."

"For real," said another. "All he do is talk some bullshit... and eat."

Rudy dug into his knapsack for his magazine. There, on the cover: The Fat Boys.

"You could be a Fat Boy, but without the jokes. A *serious* Fat Boy," said Rudy Heart sincerely. "You could speak to people."

The group of boys laughed themselves off their hard plastic seats, but Mitchell did not laugh.

He left.

Mitchell walked out of McDonald's that day and never went back. He had decided that, yeah, maybe Rudy Heart had a point.

Maybe he could rap. Maybe if he tried. Maybe he had something to say. But in his mind he was more LL Cool J than Fat Boy. He still rode his bike into the city every day, but not to meet up with his friends. He rode his bike into the city for exercise and then back into the suburbs for more. By the time he was sixteen, Mitchell, with the help of puberty, had lost weight, shot up six inches, and turned into Done Me Wrong. He could have just as easily called himself Bitches Wanna Do Me Now, but he wanted something that played on the misfortune his father's name had brought him. He still smoked, but now, given his imposing physical stature, the smoking appeared less unhealthful on him. And he never drank. Never. His father had done enough of that to fulfill the taste for drink for five, maybe six generations of Dunns to come.

Done Me Wrong filed into the McDonald's line alone, just ahead of Maybegirl. This was his first time back at this spot since he was a kid. He cautiously approached the counter. He didn't want to be recognized. He was a star, after all, despite what the critics thought of him.

"Yeah," he said, "lemme get a Big Mac, a large fry, and a large Coke."

But when the time came to pay, Done Me Wrong realized that he didn't have any money on him. The truth is, his bodyguard always carried his money for him. But he had left Bugs at the hotel and stepped out on his own today.

"You know what?" he said. "Keep it. I left my wallet back at the hotel."

The young girl behind the counter let out a dramatic labored sigh.

"Here," a small voice said as a slender hand pushed money onto the counter.

"Thanks," Done Me Wrong said, turning quickly to face the owner of the hand. "I'll pay you back. I just gotta run to my hotel."



“Forget it,” Maybegirl responded. “Don’t worry about it. I’m, like, a fan.”

Across from one another Done Me Wrong and Maybegirl sat at a window table with their respective trays in front of them.

“Why don’t you take off your ball cap?” Done Me Wrong said to Maybegirl, hoping to get a better look at her.

“Why don’t you take off yours?” Maybegirl responded, without looking up from her nuggets.

Their conversation veered from dipping sauces to the Beastie Boys. From bubble down jackets to the crispy original hot apple pie that had been sacrificed so that the overly cinnamon-y soggy one offered at the McDonald’s of late could survive.

“They still got ‘em in Europe though,” said Done Me Wrong. “The original ones without the slats. My bodyguard, Bugs, had one in Italy last week. Europeans don’t worry about burnin’ their fuckin’ tongues like we do. They know how to eat. Plus,” he added, “they don’t fuckin’ sue when they don’t.”

Both Done Me Wrong and Maybegirl laughed.

“You didn’t have one while you were there?” asked Maybegirl. “For, like, old school’s sake?”

“Nah,” said Done Me Wrong. “I gotta watch the pounds and shit. I gotta work out or else I blow up real fast. My old man’s the same. At least he was last time I seen him. He’s a fat fuck, that one. Real fuckin’ fat.”

“I’m fat too,” said Maybegirl sheepishly.

“Nah,” said Done Me Wrong. “You ain’t fat. You just layered as fuck, girl. How many layers you rockin’? It ain’t even that cold out.”

Maybegirl smiled and looked Done Me Wrong squarely in his eyes. He had addressed her as *girl* without asking first.

“What’s your name, anyway?” asked Done Me Wrong.

Maybegirl had seen his face in magazines. Seen him in his videos. She could hardly believe she was sitting across from him

right now. And he regarded her as a girl without having to be told what she was. He was sure. This made her sure. She could hardly believe she had the opportunity to tell him what she had been wanting to tell him for years.

“My name’s Maybegirl,” she said. “And your rhymes are shit. Some of the worst I’ve ever heard. Like, the worst.”

Done Me Wrong stared at Maybegirl incredulously.

“For real,” she added.

“I thought you said you was a fan,” Done Me Wrong replied.

“I am,” said Maybegirl.

“So you’re a fan of shit then?” asked Done Me Wrong, trying to contain his frustration.

“No,” she said. “I’m a fan of yours.”

“Not my rhymes,” said Done Me Wrong.

“Not your rhymes,” said Maybegirl.

Done Me Wrong’s latest CD was a terrific flop. His record label dropped him and stopped taking his calls. His girlfriend dumped him for an American Idol runner-up. One by one his past hits began appearing in television commercials without his permission. He couldn’t do anything about it. The suits owned them. They had thrown him away because they didn’t need him anymore. The songs, on the other hand, provided a very different narrative. Those they needed. Tampons, cars, and orange juice, they all needed Done Me Wrong’s hits. Done Me Wrong, in a panic to save his career, his money, and what was left of his credibility, dropped his management team immediately and got on the horn with a man who had become the most successful music mogul in the business.

“Yo,” Done Me Wrong said into his phone in the same authoritative tone he always used, regardless of whether or not he had any actual authority.

“What up, Fat Boy?” said Rudy Heart. “It’s been a long time.”

Within moments of their first meeting in Rudy Heart's plush Upper East Side office, Done Me Wrong felt immediately humbled.

"So," said Rudy Heart, "the problem is your rhymes are shit."

"Yeah, well," said Done Me Wrong, "shit or not, my rhymes is sellin' all kinds of other shit and I ain't gettin' shit in return. Turn on your fuckin' television, Rudy. You'll see what I'm talkin' about."

"I've already seen," said Rudy. "And I'm not surprised."

"Well, *I'm* surprised," said Done Me Wrong.

"Again," said Rudy, "I'm not surprised."

Maybegirl was well aware of Done Me Wrong's troubled times, but not having asked for Done Me Wrong's number, and having not been asked for hers, Maybegirl had left their McDonald's afternoon together with nothing more than a handshake and a polite thank you for lunch. She had offended him, Maybegirl figured. She had offended Done Me Wrong by telling him his rhymes were shit.

"Listen," said Rudy Heart, "I know you're probably used to being told how fucking awesome you are but, I'm telling you, if we're going to fix this we have to be straight with one another. Your writing doesn't cut it. You're not saying anything. Nobody cares. Being good looking and in good shape isn't enough. Not anymore. Where's the substance? Where'd you go, man?"

"I'm still here," said Done Me Wrong, looking down at his fifteen hundred dollar pair of sneakers.

"Good," said Rudy Heart. "But you aren't going to be invited to stay unless the people can connect with you. You get what I'm saying? *They* have to get what you're saying."

"I get what you're sayin'," said Done Me Wrong.

"Good," replied Rudy Heart, throwing Done Me Wrong a nod toward the door. "Now get the fuck out of here and go write something real. If I'm going to get you your bloody tampon

money," he laughed, "I have to get to work here. I have to get on it." Trying to stifle more laughter, he added, "I've got to get on the rag for you, homey."

Maybegirl had not written a poem in two days. She was beginning to feel anxious. Into the McDonald's bathroom she went with her pink box cutter. Sitting on the toilet, her thighs exposed to her, Maybegirl set out to carve into herself without first writing a poem upon herself in her favored black ink. She didn't have the words at the moment, just the need. With the pink box cutter, Maybegirl cut a deep heart the size of a dime into the fleshiest part of her left thigh. Blood gushed forth immediately. She breathed heavily and held a wad of toilet paper over the wound. Then, reaching into one of her many pockets, Maybegirl pulled out a small stack of gauze pads and a roll of surgical tape. Quickly replacing the toilet paper with the gauze pads and throwing it into the toilet water under her, Maybegirl applied pressure to the wound with one hand. Finally, with her other hand and her teeth, Maybegirl cut two long strips of surgical tape and stretched them over the gauze pads in an X formation to secure them.

"Ohmigod! Ohmigod!" she heard two teenage girls squeal as they entered the bathroom.

"I can't believe Done Me Wrong signed my arm! I'm never gonna wash it," screeched one.

"He is soooooooo hot," exclaimed the other. "I'm gonna go get him and bring him in here so I can blow him."

"Just blow him?" asked the one in mock disbelief. "I'm gonna go ask him if he wants to fuck the shit outta me."

The girls burst out in a fit of giddy giggles.

Maybegirl could tell that they were only half joking.

"Hey," Maybegirl said, standing to Done Me Wrong's right as he signed female body parts and posed for pictures on the sidewalk.

“Maybegirl,” said Done Me Wrong softly. “I been lookin’ for you.”

Once again Maybegirl looked Done Me Wrong in his eyes. Only this time, she had to look up from under her baseball cap, and he had to look down from under his.

“Why were you looking for me?” she asked, just as the small crowd of his female fans had begun to disperse.

“The thing is,” Done Me Wrong replied, “I think I need your help.”

Maybegirl shuffled her feet a bit. She wore sneakers too, but the cheap ones. Cheaper ones.

“Yeah,” said Maybegirl, “I think I might need your help too.”

Done Me Wrong nodded his head and steadily observed the small sad figure standing in front of him.

“You know what I think, girl?” said Done Me Wrong. “I think you might need my help *first*.”

Then, to both the surprise of Done Me Wrong and Maybegirl alike, Maybegirl began to weep. Done Me Wrong, without hesitating, reached out to Maybegirl and pulled her toward him. With his arms around her, at first, he couldn’t feel her inside all those layers. He had to keep squeezing until he actually found her in there. When he finally did, he was relieved.

“In case you don’t already know,” he said, holding her close to him, his chin resting on top of her head, “Mitchell. My real name’s Mitchell.”

Then, into his chest, Maybegirl, feeling safe and loved and understood for the first time in her life whispered, “Gregory.”

**SANDRA BAZZARELLI** is a singer/songwriter and writing instructor from Bergen County, New Jersey. She earned her BA in Literature and Writing from Columbia University, and her MA in English Education from NYU. The more healthful her eating habits become, the more McDonald’s crops up in her writing.

## The Rodeo Clown

Annam Manthiram

When we made love, the white never came off his face.

I met him after a rodeo in Kansas. He was the clown that got himself bucked Christopher Reeve style and had to be taken to the hospital; my mother was his bed-mate. The two got along well, though my mother said it frightened her that he never cared to wash away the clown parts. She didn't ask him to of course, that being his livelihood and one wouldn't ask a member of the NRA to put aside his guns.

It was my mother's second day in the hospital; she'd been admitted for a quickie hysterectomy. She told me that they didn't take their time with a woman's vagina once you were old, so she was in and out of there in less than a week. During one of her naps, the clown had asked me for a drink of water. Both of his arms were in casts, and he explained that he was tired of bugging the nurses for help because all they wanted to do was laugh.

"They see a lot of sadness around here," he said. "I suppose they get to needing some cheering up, but I'm too tired for all that now."

When I shoved the curtain aside, I saw that he was fully dressed in the manner of a stereotypical clown, complete with a red bulb nose, pasty white makeup, and a curly yellow wig. He looked more like a pastiche of a clown than an actual clown.

"I'm Dolores," I said.

"Dolores. I like it."

"Yeah," I said.

I stood, holding the plastic tumbler of water to his lips, feeling awkward that I was a party to something so private. The act of drinking seemed so naked. After he was done, he asked me, "Dolores, would you like to go out sometime?"

That was how it started.

After his casts were off, I saw that his forearms were large and tender like the premium meat my mother went bonkers for at the deli down the street, and once he and I figured out how our joints fit, we spent most of our time at my house.

He was a patient but passionate lover: always asking me if I was satisfied, and if I wasn't, he tried his best until I was. To be with a clown wasn't in the scenarios that got me hot in those romance books I read, so I usually closed my eyes during sex.

When I visited with my mother, she'd ask me, "What does he really look like, under all that?" I told her he was handsome, but I never spoke the truth: that I had yet to see what he really looked like.

Several months into our relationship, I grew tired of being the girl who was dating the clown. I was a plain girl with average brown hair and cat-like eyes. No one had ever stared at me before, but now everyone stared at us wherever we went. I didn't like the attention; he seemed oblivious to it.

At first, I liked how he'd create balloon animals for the kids who smiled at us. Later, it annoyed me, and I was annoyed at myself for disliking the parts of him that were so selfless. It was hard to separate who he was from what he was. The two blended together, and I wasn't certain it was a bad thing.

I came clean to my mother about his permanent disguise, and she said it wasn't respectable and likened it to those freaks who made their way through town from cities like Los Angeles or Seattle.

"Make him show himself. It's not right," she said.

Still, I waited. It wasn't the right time to ask that of him, and I was unsure of where all of this was going.

"He makes me laugh. He's useful," I said, when my mother pestered me again. Earlier that morning, he'd changed the light bulb in my kitchen without a step stool. He was tall.

“Does he wake up that way? What does he look like coming out of the shower?”

“I don’t know. He never showers at my place.”

“Dolores, you sure have a way of catching them.”

On our six-month anniversary, he took us to the best restaurant in town: a faux-authentic Italian eatery run by Indians. The food had a slight curry taste to it, which I liked. It gave it an edge.

I wore the blue-green blouse he said reminded him of kelp, and he wore the clown suit with the brass buttons, but we were declined seating because of his clown face.

“I’m sorry,” he said. “It was supposed to be a special night for us.”

“Let’s order pizza,” I said. We drove to his place.

I had come to appreciate his house, for it was completely opposite of who he was. He said the house had originally belonged to his grandmother, who’d had a disdain for anything embellished or garish.

“She didn’t believe in furniture,” he said. As a result, there were expanses of empty space intermingled with Technicolor clown gear, kind of like a modernist art exhibit.

In the living room (the area most sparse), he fed me slices of cheese, and I licked his fingers afterward. He tickled the insides of my ears when I drank soda and told me how much he cared for me.

“I’m starting to love you a little,” he whispered. We held each other close, the puffy sleeves from his outfit grazing the inner parts of my elbows until his stomach gurgled and he reached for another slice. Halfway through eating it, a round of tomato sauce squirted over his face.

“Crap,” he said.

“Here,” I said, extending a napkin. He dabbed at it lightly, but the sauce was already starting to crust.

“Go use the bathroom, rinse it off,” I said. He shook his head no.



"It's okay, it's fine."

"No, it's disgusting. Wash it off," I said, my voice starting to get a little louder.

"No," he said.

"What is your problem? It's not right." I found myself using my mother's words, unable to stop.

When we became more concerned with the volume of our voices than the substance of our sentences, he locked himself in the bathroom. I waited and waited and waited for him to come out. Finally, I dozed off on the floor next to the pizza box that was already starting to gather ants. When I woke, I saw that he had fallen asleep in his bed, the crazy kind where your legs twitch and your mouth moves. His face was white like a chocolate moon, the sauce completely gone.

The next morning, I tried to call him, but he didn't answer. I went to his house, but either he wasn't home or he didn't want to come to the door. After two weeks, he called to say he thought it was best if we didn't see each other anymore.

"Why?"

"Because you want to change me, and I don't want to be changed."

"I don't even know what you look like, for real."

"Yes, you do."

"No!" I shouted. "You're not a real fucking clown, okay!" I waited for a response, but all I heard was silence.

"Goodbye," he said.

I felt our breakup like a broken bone. For six straight months I cried. Only in the mornings, when I realized he was gone and that I was the reason he had left.

\*\*\*

A year later, my mother died from complications related to her hysterectomy. In a small town like ours, there wasn't much I could

do in the way of filing a malpractice suit. I accepted her death the way I accepted most things that were difficult in my life. I slept a lot and watched the junk TV my mother was fond of. It made me feel like she was still here.

At the funeral, the clown showed up. He was dressed in black this time, no cartoonish garb, but his face was still painted and his wig still yellow. Angry that he'd ignored me for over a year and now chose to make a statement after my mother's death when I really had nobody at all, I moved to tell him to leave, to fuck off.

When I drew closer to him, I noticed he was crying. The tears were coming down faster than he could wipe them away. And as he rubbed at his face, harder and harder, trying to get at the tears, his face was still white, the tissues still clean. I then touched his face, kissed his lips. While we hugged, I pulled at the back of his wig, but it was rooted solidly in place. We separated, and I looked at him for a long time.

"It's you," I finally said.

"Dolores, it's always been me," he replied.

I nodded, and we held hands as we went to say goodbye to my mother.

**ANNAM MANTHIRAM** is the author of two novels, *The Goju Story* and *After the Tsunami*, and a short story collection (*Dysfunction*), which was a Finalist in the 2010 Elixir Press Fiction Award and received Honorable Mention in Leapfrog Press' 2010 fiction contest. She is proud of the fact that her work has been published (or is forthcoming) in many cool places.

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# The Seven Stages of Sorrow

Michael Frissore

## *I. Crash*

When we got inside the teacup ride, Jay made it fly into the air like the Great Space Coaster.

“Check it out,” Jay said, positioning his arms as if to say *Ta da*. “We’re flying, dude.”

“Holy crap!” Colleen, Jay’s girlfriend, said. “What are you? A witch?”

“I don’t know,” Jay replied.

Colleen and I both stared at him.

“Oh, come on,” Jay said. “Let’s not Snuffleupagus this. You knew I had powers. Remember that time I sent you to Rome instead of home?”

“No,” I said.

“Hey, you know what?” Colleen said. “This is freaking me out. I’m outta here.” She then leaped out of the flying ride and to her death.

“Colleen!” Jay screamed. “Dude,” he then said. “I don’t have magic powers.”

“I didn’t think so,” I replied, right before we hit a mountain.

## *II. Grief*

What had actually happened was that some bolts came loose from the car and threw us into the air. We survived the crash and, unlike Colleen, lived to go into litigation with the town that ran the fair. Colleen’s family won their case. Jay and I each took a settlement. The money from mine was enough that I could take a

leave of absence from work to be on constant suicide watch over Jay. The money could not replace Colleen. He was despondent for weeks and would hardly talk to anyone. He kept asking how and why we survived when Colleen didn't. I didn't have any answers for him. I told him it was just God's way. God needed a hot, twenty-year-old college student and for Jay to be miserable.

After a lot of pushing, Jay saw a doctor who put him on an anti-depressant. Then I found him a support group for people with anxiety and depression. It took me days to convince him to go to the group and he finally agreed, but only if I went with him. So there we were in this horrible little room in a building next to a church that they used for support group meetings and intramural volleyball. The room was full of sad sacks, all old enough to be our parents. They were hypochondriacs, all worried about colliding with a busload of kindergarteners on the way to work or that the mole on their back might be cancerous.

We sat there listening to a tape of some woman who had the magical cure for anxiety. She gave us this brilliant piece of advice: "The secret is in the ability to wipe from your mind anything you don't want there."

There. Got it? You're cured. Where's my money? I would have been more optimistic if she had said, "The secret is bacon. Eat lots and lots of bacon, scrambled eggs and Minute Maid orange juice. Not Tropicana, Minute Maid."

"Hey," I whispered to Jay. "Can I just pay a homeless guy a dollar to squeegee my mind? What if I wipe too hard and lose the ability to walk, drive, or play checkers?"

Jay began weeping. Or maybe he was laughing. I couldn't tell.

"What's wrong, Horatio?" the group leader, Nina, asked Jay. Other than a brief "I see we have some new faces," in the beginning of the meeting, this was the first time Jay and I were acknowledged. Jay told Nina and the group that his name was Horatio.

"I don't have the equipment to wipe my mind of negative

thoughts," Jay said.

"Equipment?" Bob with OCD said. "You don't physically wipe your mind, you jackass."

"Oh, it's go time," Jay said as he lunged at Bob and pounded him with his fists, all the while telling him that if he doesn't touch every street sign on the way home tonight, he's going to die. I tried to pull Jay off of him, but I instantly hated Bob when we walked in.

"Stop, Fellatio!" I shouted. "Stop!"

Ulee, the sexy, forty-something European woman, who obviously had been taking a kickboxing class, pulled me off of Jay, and then Jay off of Bob and began slapping Jay's face with her feet.

"Sorry," she said to a fallen Jay. "My doctor just upped my prescription."

"How about *increased*?" I said. "He *increased* your prescription."

"Upped is a word," Bob said.

"So is *increased*," I replied. "And it's a better one, you freak."

This started another battle resulting in Bob and I rolling around the entire building in a big puff of smoke like Popeye and Bluto. I finally broke free and Jay and I ran to my car and got the hell out of there.

### III. Fight

So the group didn't work, and, despite the medication, Jay's depression was getting worse. He sat home all day for weeks watching television. Periodically, the old Jay would show up, but most of the time I would come home to a Gloomy Gus. I knew I had to bring him out of this funk he was in. I mean, life goes on, right? Seize the day? Look before you leap? Whatever other clichés may or may not sum up Jay's situation? So when I came home one day to Jay sitting directly in front of the television, I knew I had to kick it up a notch.

"Jay, sweetie," I said. "Don't sit so close to the television. You'll go blind."

"No, that's masturbation, dude," he replied. "Don't *masturbate* so close to the television. But I'll tell you, man, soap operas rule. I'm hooked on, like, five of them."

"That's fantastic," I said.

"Dude, I'm trapped inside the tyranny of this cursed box. Please help me."

"What would you like me to do?" I said.

"This thing is powerfully evil," he said. "It's like Stalin, this oppressive bastard. It's like Satan's magic eye, pulling me in like frigging *Poltergeist*."

"Hey, did you ever think that if Heather O'Rourke from the *Poltergeist* movies had lived, she would have posed for all those men's magazines? I'd bet she'd be really hot."

With this I kicked the television screen in, smashing Jay's fascist master.

"Dude," Jay said. "That's so not what I meant. What the hell is wrong with you?"

"Jay," I said. "I know you miss Colleen, but a wise man or two once said, 'If you love something, set it free. Yadda yadda yadda.'"

"How does that..." Jay started to say, but he stopped, came toward me and kicked me in the testicles. A good shot too. My vision blurred.

"Hey, man," he continued, "when one of the chicks who sang 'It's Raining Men' died, did I make fun of you?"

"Okay," I said. "A. Yes you did, B, I have no idea why. It's not like I was a fan or even knew the woman's name. And C, in no way am I making fun of you. I'm just trying to help you. Get out. Join something, like a book club or a cult."

"I always wanted to learn a martial art."

"Wonderful. That ruthless kick to my boys was a dandy start."

“Do you know of any local cults?”

“I don’t know. We’ll check the Yellow Pages.”

“Nice.”

“Hey, Jay,” I said, and as he turned around I bashed him in the face with a frying pan a la *Tom & Jerry*. That’ll teach him to kick me in the nuts. He lunged at me and grabbed my neck, trying to choke me. I broke free, grabbed his bottle of beer to drink and spit in his face like a Japanese pro wrestler. However, this was definitely not beer. I gagged and spat this garbage out everywhere.

“What the hell is this?” I demanded.

“That’s my tobacco spit,” he said.

I ran to the bathroom and threw up, realizing full well that I should have known not to drink from any open bottle in that place. Jay’s cups, jugs and bottles of chewing tobacco spit were everywhere.

#### *IV. Party*

After vomiting, I stormed out. For the next week we spoke very little to each other. It was quite childish. Jay even put Scotch tape in the middle of the apartment to separate us like on some silly sitcom.

One day I came home, chloroformed Jay and took him to our friend Tom’s place for a party. I didn’t even let him put on cologne. Screw that, I said.

We showed up three hours early for Tom’s party. Tom was our friend, sort of. Neither of us was close with him. I ran into him at an adult video store a couple of nights before and he invited us. I had worked with him at Walgreen’s until he was fired for leaving a box cutter out and a four-year-old found it and cut his mother with it. They were always left out, but nothing had ever happened until then.

At the party, Jay was determined not to have fun. He sat

quietly on the sofa, nursing a beer. The drink was more a prop for him than anything else. He was very worried about mixing alcohol with the Paxil he was on. He sat staring at the television as Poison's "Unskinny Bop" played on the stereo. I was sitting in the bathtub, which was also acting as a makeshift cooler, watching him, and growing tired of his quietness.

"Hey, Mr. Happy," I shouted. "Slow down, you're causing a scene. I can't take you anywhere."

"Is that sarcasm?" he said as he came towards me.

"You always could detect that, couldn't you? Hey, you want another drink?"

"No," he said. "I think I want to go home."

"Why, man? Aren't you having fun?"

"Yeah, I guess, but..."

"Tom's gonna put in a Dokken CD next."

"Tom's upstairs throwing furniture out the window. And it's nine o'clock and you're already in the bathtub."

"I need my rubber ducky, dude."

"Yes, well, about my leaving?"

"So go home. What do you want, a permission slip?"

"Well, no."

"Dear Mrs. Teacher Person," I said, mime writing, "Jay has my permission to go on a magical mystery field trip home. Please whack him with a ping-pong paddle exactly one hundred times, dip him in hot mustard, and toss him in the garbage. Hugs and kisses, His Daddy."

"Well, thank you," Jay said. "But you know I need your assistance to get home."

"Oh, right. Sorry, dude. Where's my wand?" I said, searching through the ice in the tub. "Okay, here we go. *Alakazam!*"

Jay then became a giant squid. Or maybe he didn't. I sort of passed out around here. I woke up still in the tub and freezing the next morning to find out someone had taken Jay home at around



eleven.

### *V. Desert Caravan*

Jay was a little upset with me for not “being there” for him. His depression was still getting worse. Not only was the Paxil not working, it had made him so tired that he kept falling asleep while driving. The state took his driver's license away and declared him a bigger hazard behind the wheel than Mr. Magoo. Plus, the sexual dysfunction, a possible side effect he initially laughed at, was now making him completely crazy. Jay's doctor recommended a long vacation. I suggested Vegas, but Jay wanted to go to Europe. I then suggested Amsterdam, but Jay said he wanted to caravan through the desert.

“Which desert?” I asked.

“I don't know,” he said. “The Gobi?”

“The Gobi Desert isn't in Europe,” I said. “It's in Mongolia.”

“Then Mongolia it is.”

Holy shit. I told Jay that being a mongoloid doesn't mean he has any kind of ties to Mongolia, and that we have decent deserts in America, but his mind was made up. Four weeks later we were caravanning through the Gobi Desert. I don't know where he got the camels, but they were freaking me out. Between the heat and the movement of the creature underneath me, I grew sick of it fast, but at least Jay seemed to be in a good mood.

“Jay,” I said. “Why are we in a desert in Mongolia?”

“It's nice. Don't you think?”

“Nice?”

“Well, it's just that life is fragile, you know? People come, and then they go.”

“You're young. You can't let Colleen's death ruin your life.”

“It's not just her,” he said. “I think of all the people who've died. Rock stars, professional wrestlers. I wanted to be a rock star

or wrestler when I was a kid. I'd probably be dead myself if my dreams had come true."

"Probably."

"Hey, we should go to India, or something. How far is that?"

"India?" I said. "Well, I hear the dollar to rupee rate is quite good."

"The currency in India is the date rape drug?"

"Not *roofie*. *Rupee*," I said. "But, I don't understand, as I was saying, why, of all things, we're caravanning through a God-forsaken desert like Hope and frigging Crosby."

"I'm dying."

"What?"

"I found out a few weeks ago that I have AIDS and I'm dying."

"AIDS?" I said. "How?"

"My dentist has a thing for prostitutes and heroin."

"Wow. Why didn't you tell me this before? I'm sorry."

"Thanks," he said. "Now I have to stop taking the Paxil because of the AZT. I'm gonna lose so much weight. You should get AIDS, dude."

"You think I'm fat?"

"I'm just goofing around. I'm not dying."

"You are such a jackass."

"Well," he said. "You know what, man. I think I'll be all right. I mean, it took a while, but I think this helped. And, you know, you've been..."

"Hey, Jay?"

"Yes?"

"What the hell is that?"

Coming right towards us was an unruly gang of Mongolian ninjas. We hopped off our camels and grabbed our swords, which were Jay's idea to bring. There were seven of them and only two of us, but we handled ourselves beautifully. It was a clean sweep.

We killed every one of them, and fell, exhausted, into each other's arms.

"Oh, Jay," I said. "Let's never argue again."

"No, let's not."

"Jay, darling, will you marry me?"

"Oh, yes. Yes, my sweet, yes."

"What?" the camels seemed to say to each other, as romantic music and rose pedals filled the wonderful Gobi Desert. We were married two weeks later in Japan by Akira, the Samurai Justice of the Peace.

## VI. *New Love*

Our families were shocked when we announced that we were married. They had no idea we were gay, and neither did we, really. We honeymooned in Provincetown, where we walked along the beach and took in a drag queen production of *The Golden Girls*. It was the most beautiful week of our lives. Jay and I bought a little place in the Berkshires and lived happily with our dog. Jay seemed to be much happier. All of the moping he was doing about Colleen gave way to his fighting for gay rights. It was an amazing transformation.

One autumn day Jay was outside doing yard work as I went about the kitchen, preparing lunch and making cocoa. Jay walked into the house covered with leaves. I freaked out and dragged him into the patio.

"Dude, what the hell?" he said.

"You're covered in leaves," I said. "You don't walk into the house like that."

"I was just playing in the leaves with Dog."

"What are you, seven? Those leaves are disgusting. I don't even want Dog playing in them. Now she's got to be washed and the kitchen has to be mopped."

“Sorry, man.”

He left as I started cleaning the kitchen. When he returned, he was carrying a giant sack over his shoulder like Santa Claus. He opened the sack and began taking wet leaves out and throwing them at me.

“What is wrong with you? Stop it,” I said. “Pick up these leaves and go back outside.”

Jay began picking the leaves up off the floor and putting them back into the bag. I went to get the mop out of the closet. I moved some things around and there hung one of Colleen’s old jackets. Why did he still have this? I thought we had given all of her things away.

“Jay,” I said. “Do you think we were meant for each other?”

“What do you mean?”

“Well, I mean we haven’t even had sex. Are we really gay?”

“Hmm,” Jay said.

“Because I’m not sure I’m gay.”

“Hey, man. Don’t ruin what we have.”

“What do we have exactly?”

“We have Dog and each other,” Jay said. “And, by the way, Holly Golightly, why don’t you name this poor dog? You’ve had him for almost a year.”

“*Her*. We’ve had *her* for almost a year. But I’m the one who paid for her. I’ll call her what I want to. Now, go away.”

Jay and Dog went back outside as I continued with lunch and the cocoa. I thought more about our situation: the wedding, the honeymoon, the house. Why did we rush through it so fast? Was I just playing a role? Why was I suddenly questioning it all? Weren’t we both happy again?

I looked out the window and saw a giant wind blowing and leaves scattering through the air. Then I saw Jay and Dog floating among the leaves. They were going higher and higher. I went to the porch to take a look, but they weren’t outside. When the wind stopped, I went out to look for them. They were gone, nowhere to

be found. My last words to Jay were, “Now, go away.”

## *VII. Floating Away*

Bob Dylan said the answer is blowing in the wind. My two best friends were blowing in the wind and never came back. I never saw Jay or Dog again. It was as if God plucked them right from me. So, if you're out in the park or a supermarket parking lot, and you look up to see a big, dumb, football-player-looking guy and a golden retriever flying above you, tell them to come home. The cocoa is ready.

**MICHAEL FRISSORE** is the author of a poetry chapbook called *Poetry is Dead*. His fiction has appeared or is forthcoming in *Monkeybicycle*, *Gold Dust's Solid Gold Anthology*, *Fast Forward Volume 3*, *The Houston Literary Review*, and elsewhere. He writes for *SlurveMag.com* and blogs at [michaelfrissore.blogspot.com](http://michaelfrissore.blogspot.com).

# That Was Called Love

Chloe Caldwell

## 199 North 6<sup>th</sup> Street Brooklyn, New York

I am walking down the street towards Bedford Avenue with my brother at night. I have lived in Williamsburg for roughly six hours. I tell him I'm hungry. I tell him that my stomach is empty. He tells me I live in New York. He tells me to get used to it.

My brother and I keep a typewriter in our bathroom, in front of the toilet on top of the radiator. In black Sharpie we have written: **Please Continue The Story.**

I sleep with my brother's friend from The Strand Bookstore on the futon. He is suicidal and musical and has long hair and a nose ring and I fall a little bit in love with him.

My mother comes to visit. I am having a hangover from heroin. She comes into the café I work at on Grand Street. I am behind the counter. She sits at the counter. I have my hair in braids. There is no air conditioning. I am almost crying and want to reach out for help. A few days later I get a letter from her about how much she loves me and I fall in love with her all over again.

I sleep with a French man who is a thief and I fall a little bit in love with him.

My brother is leaving for Europe and I am sitting in the bathroom writing him a letter on the typewriter and crying.

You move in the day he leaves.

It is morning. It is Brooklyn. You tell me if I am always in a rush then I should make my eggs in the microwave as opposed to the stove and you show me how. This is something so useful to me that I will use forever and this is why I love you. Your computer is playing Dr. Dre and Snoop Dogg and is resting on the garbage can.

We buy something we call The Jam Box at Urban Outfitters. It is a metallic gold cooler with a strap to wear it like a purse and also a chord to hook up an iPod to it. It is fifty dollars. We decide it is exactly what we need in our lives. Not to mention a great conversation piece. We split it. Twenty-five and twenty-five. For months we walk around listening to The Unicorns and Clap Your Hands Say Yeah.

We sell our clothes most nights on the corner of Bedford Avenue and North 6<sup>th</sup> Street with a sign we made that reads 'Cheap Shit.' One night I am drinking rum out of a Coca-Cola can the cops come and walk me home and give me a ticket.

We decide to go to bed early one night and wake up at five a.m. to jump in the East River. We do it. Then we walk across the Williamsburg Bridge. We are sticky.

The suicidal musical longhaired boy decides to die that summer. You are with me when it happens. You are with me when we walk to the bar.

## **156 India Street Brooklyn, New York**

We move in the day after Halloween. We are never home at the same time. You paint half of the living room teal. I paint the other half. You paint half of the kitchen coral. I paint the other half.

We have a party and leave a bucket of black paint out for free use. Our teal walls now have black drips, dicks and words all over them.

We do not have a couch for months. We do, however, have a black trunk that we found on the street. You write the words 'DANCE TRUNK' on it in purple paint and we take turns singing Sinead O'Connor's 'Nothing Compares 2 U' to each other.

It's my birthday. We are loud. We go downstairs and across the street to the bodega by the G train. You are drunk and steal a forty. The man behind the counter catches you. When we get back to our apartment there is a white piece of paper on the door that reads: 'WTF? You have neighbors.' You take a pen out of your purse and write: 'Neighbors have birthdays.'

We are sleeping in the bedroom we share. In my sleep I kick your bike that was leaning against the foot of my bed. It falls on you. You scream. You leave it there and keep sleeping.

I think I flush a hairbrush down the toilet but I am drunk so I am not sure. Our toilet does not work for seven days. We live with a metal bowl on the toilet and piss into it and dump it down the bathtub or sink drain. One morning you shit in a bag in the living room.

You are sitting in a rolling desk chair. You are wearing a headdress. You are wearing a magenta silk short robe from Victoria's Secret over your clothes and I love you.

I start buying Zebra Cakes every time I am drunk which are most nights. You like the 99-cent tortilla chips. We wake up hung over with wrappers scattering our apartment.



I tell everyone at a party that Brie can actually get you high. Everyone makes fun of me but later you tell me that you know what I mean.

We host something that we call Breakfast Club on Wednesday mornings with our neighbor and we drink champagne and smoke joints and eat eggs before starting our days.

We both call out of work. It is snowing. We want a snow day. We pretend that we are Devendra Banhart. We cut out pictures of him and put them on chains. We hang pictures of him from the ceiling. You decide you need more trinkets. We make jewelry out of our combined junk jewelry. We go to the Polish liquor store. We buy Beefeater gin. We have a circus and jump on our trampoline. We prank phone call people. We write and record songs. We take the subway into our jobs in Manhattan in the morning with headaches. I always dare you to get off the train at the wrong stop and walk to the wall and back, to see if you can make it before the subway takes off again. You always do it.

We did a lot of cocaine at the bar Grassroots and now we are waiting for the L train. I am wearing a black skirt and fishnet tights. You are standing too close to the subway tracks fucking with your phone and you drop it in and the back comes off and the battery comes out. I jump down to get it. I see a rat. I stay down there with the pieces in my hands and hold my arms up and yell, "I've always wanted to do this!" before some guy helps me out. The train comes ten seconds later and everyone who saw what happened treats me like a hero.

We buy bikes from K-Mart with your tax return check and get drunk and see who can balance on them in the kitchen the best because we're too afraid to ride them outside.

We have no groceries. I eat condensed cooking cheese soup and you catch me when you come home from work. You laugh for twenty minutes.

It's your turn to make breakfast.

It's my turn to make breakfast.

You're wearing my jeans.

I'm wearing your jeans.

I am writing.

You are painting.

We are reading Bukowski and Burroughs in our separate beds in the bedroom we share.

You give me a toy brontosaurus and say it reminds you of me and I don't know what you mean by that but I keep it on my windowsill for three years.

In the middle of the night, you steal a Christmas tree from where they are selling them on the street so now we have a Christmas tree.

I sleep with a man from my memoir class and I fall a little bit in love with him because he tells me that I am Batman and you are Robin.

We are sitting next to each other cross-legged on the floor drinking Bloody Marys. We have just done our laundry. We are counting our underwear. I have thirty pairs and you have twenty-four. We have an awkward moment and then I ask you what you have been doing for the past six days.

We are walking around the Southside of Brooklyn. It is hot out. We are wearing headdresses and drinking Sparks. The cops pull up. I tell the cop that I just got back from Berlin and in Berlin there are some neighborhoods where you actually get tickets if you are **not** drinking on the street. He believes me and waives the ticket.

We get a mini keg of Heineken. We do speedballs of oxy contin and cocaine. We are playing catch with a five pound weight. I throw a curveball accidentally and smash my computer.

I come home from work one night to find the apartment condemned. The fire escape had fallen off. Our wall had crumbled. The Titanic. The shipwreck. The cops. I call you. We cry. We go to the bar. We order Johnny Walker Black.

**2809 65<sup>th</sup> Street  
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My friends in New York call me daily. All I do anymore in Seattle is talk outside on the stoop to my friends in New York. My roommates in Seattle ask me if I am doing cocaine. My roommates in Seattle ask me how many minutes I have on my phone. My friends in New York tell me they are exhausted. My friends in New York tell me that they are at bars and that they are exhausted. My friend in New York tells me she stole a few dollars out of the Habitat For Humanity box to get a coffee. My friend in New York tells me she forgot to steal toilet paper from The Film Forum. My friend in New York tells me he snuck into an Australian girl's purse and finished all of her cocaine. My friend in New York tells me he lost the journal that I gave him at a boat base and he walked up and down the East River in the dark looking in trashcans for it. My friend in New York tells me she may or may not have had an orgy last night. My friend in New York tells me she is going to Dunkin' Donuts with a guy she met on the street that loves Leonard Cohen. My friend in New York tells me she is reading my writing to a guy on a roof in Bushwick while they listen to P.J. Harvey. My friend in New York tells me she had sex with a guy last night and that he told her she was "like an amusement park." My friend in New York tells me the warehouse party he went to last night was fun

until he accidentally put his cigarette out in a girl's eye. My friend in New York tells me she is in a hot Chinese restaurant and thinks she just got her period and should she get crab legs? My friend in New York tells me she is sitting in Tompkins Square Park, alone and restless, and that she should go home and do laundry but doesn't want to leave the Lower East Side until something magic happens. She says that there was an Asian dude playing Oasis songs, which was great, but not enough.

Last night I described New York to a rock climber in Seattle.

"It sounds like, New York is for you, what the mountains are to me," he said.

I fell a little bit in love with him for saying that.

**CHLOE CALDWELL** is a writer who changes addresses too frequently. She is looking for the prize that does not exist. You can read her most recent work in [Bananafish Magazine](#).