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THE EMERGENCY EXIT

Thomas Porter

Submitted in Partial Completion of the
Requirements for Departmental Honors in English

Bridgewater State University

May 14, 2013

Dr. Joyce Rain Anderson, Thesis Director
Dr. Derek Leuenberger, Committee Member
Dr. Lee Torda, Committee Member

Dedicated to the youth of the city, who linger in my mind.

The Frog Pond

The traffic light changes to red and before the walk sign is lit, Barry, Joe and Tony are already in the crosswalk merging into the crowds. I take a double step and move quickly to match their pace narrowly avoiding a large woman with a Filene's bag in each hand. I scuff my hundred dollar Italian leather shoes trying to regain my place alongside them. We have already stopped at Panera where I ordered a Tuscan Chicken Panini. It is the 21st of May and this is the first time they have asked me to come along with them for lunch. I have been working for Bernstein and Cohen law firm since mid January and I have been hoping this day would come. I am the new associate at the firm and I am usually left out, but today Barry, the lead associate, asks me if I want to go to the Commons for lunch. My nose somehow finds the sandwich's scent among the flowers and exhaust which triggers my stomach into reminding me that I had skipped breakfast this morning. I am hoping that they sit at the first bench so we can eat, but they seemed determined to get to a particular destination. I can feel my shirt sticking to my back, but I won't slow down to take off my new suit coat. We walk, or should I say double time, from Park Street Station all the way to the Public Gardens. Finally, Barry sits down on an empty bench facing the Frog Pond. There are some kids playing in the wading pool ducking in and out of the fountain. The bench feels warm through my polyester pants and I hope the back of the bench hides the sweat marks on my button collared shirt. I wait for Barry to start to eat, and then I take too big of a bite out of my Panini.

Joe looks at me with a smirk and asks, "You hungry?"

I make the mistake of trying to answer with food in my mouth and say, "Yeah, mm, missed breakfast."

Luckily, right then a fair skinned lady with blonde hair in an aquamarine sleeveless dress came walking by causing somewhat of a distraction and I can finish what is in my mouth.

“So how do you like working here?” Barry says turning his head from the lady towards me.

“Good,” I reply.

“You ever been to the Commons or Gardens before?”

“Yes, I grew up in Southie and I’ve been here a few times,” I said.

“Check it out, a city kid trying to be a Boston Lawyer, how the hell did you afford to go to law school, coming from Southie? Probably a free ride on my Dad’s tax money,” Tony says. Joe leans over and looks at Tony and says, “Not everyone gets the luxury of growing up in Newton like you. Cut him some slack, he’s okay.”

“Of course he’s okay or else he wouldn’t be here, besides he could probably kick you and Joe’s ass together, you suburban boys can’t fight for shit,” says Barry with a grin.

“Don’t forget you’re from Brookline Barry, that isn’t exactly the city,” says Tony.

“Eat your lunch and shut up, or we will leave you behind tomorrow and you can eat with paralegals,” Barry says.

Tony suddenly stands up and laughs. He points towards the frog pond and yells excitedly, “Hey, check that out, the bum is taking a bath in the fountain. You’ve got to be shitting me.”

A large man covered in grime has stripped down to his pants and what used to be a white T-shirt and is using a bar of soap to clean himself off in the public fountain. There is a shopping cart with a sleeping bag on top of it with empty cans and bottles loaded inside, some old dirty cardboard and a plastic gallon jug filled with some red liquid hanging off the shopping carts

handle. A pair of worn out army boots and a camouflaged army coat are floating around the frog pond next to him. His now wet, long, black hair is matted to the side of his face and his beard drips black water drops into the pool. Some kids stand far away clutching their mother's hands and people are giving him a wide berth.

Tony starts to walk towards him and Joe says, "Come on Tony, leave him alone."

Barry says, "Lunch just got a bit more entertaining" and he walks with Tony towards the man.

Joe looks at me with his eye brows scrunched and his lips pulled tight and says, "Come on." I drop my Panini and hurry along with Joe.

"Hey Grizzly Adams, what do think this is your bathtub? Get the fuck out of there," Tony yells.

The man doesn't turn around; he is sitting now and seems to be washing his clothes.

"Let's get his carriage and see if that will get him out of the pond," said Barry with a weird look in his eyes.

Joe says, "Cut the shit guys, leave him alone, its none of our business."

"Bullshit, that guy is stinking up my Frog Pond," Barry snaps.

Tony and Barry walk over to the homeless man's carriage and yell, "Hey Grizz, is this your stuff?"

A group of spectators have gathered and one lady starts yelling at the displaced man. The man looks at the lady and then at Barry and Tony. The look on his face seems to be that of confusion. He reaches over and puts on his sopping wet army jacket and then slumps over staring at the water.

"Let move his carriage to the trash and see if that will get him to going," Barry says.

“Come on guys let’s get out here, it’s getting late and we have to get back,” I say as I start to move towards the walkway.

“Relax, we have time,” Tony says.

“Tom’s right, it’s almost one o’clock. Let it be and let’s get out of here, we can just let the cops handle it,” Joe says.

Tony grabs the jug on the handle of the shopping cart and starts spilling the red liquid on the ground. I hear the water splash and a whooshing sound and see a flash of white appear in the pond. The impoverished man is already within ten feet before Tony sees him moving towards him. A dark splotch appears on Tony’s Brooks Brothers suit and his face is frozen in terror. Only a squelch from Barry’s mouth propels Tony into motion, but it is too late. The man rams into Tony who flies up into the air and crashes on the pathway. The homeless man turns towards Barry who had started to run towards me and Joe. With five long strides the vagrant is in front of us. I notice that his eyes are bright blue, a piercing brilliant blue, the same as the sky on a beautiful spring day and that the right side of his upper lip is lifted creating a menacing snarl.

He bounds past Joe and me and is about to grab Barry when I yell, “Johnny!” The enraged man stops immediately and snaps his head around looking me straight in the eyes.

He blinks twice and cocks his head sideways. “Hi, Tom,” he says showing a mouth full of tobacco stained teeth.

Joe looks at him and then back at me and says, “You know him?”

“Yeah”... I bite my upper lip hard with my bottom teeth.

Johnny looks around at everyone staring at him and then back at me and says, “I didn’t mean no harm.”

“I know you didn’t Johnny, I’m sorry they messed with ya, you better get out of here before the cops show up.”

“Too late,” Johnny says and points over at the cops running towards him with their guns drawn. “It was good to see ya Tom, tell Mom I said hi and I’m okay. Sorry if I caused ya trouble.”

“No trouble Johnny, we’re good. I’ll tell Mom you were asking for her.”
I slowly walked away from the Frog Pond, back to a place, where, I thought I wanted to be.

Light Blue Eyes

This is a story about the night that everything changed and how I remember it.

The bulb on the streetlight in front of Mrs. Fletcher's house projects a dim glow, fazing in and out, casting shadows against her aged Victorian. We creep along the shifting silhouettes until we reached the knarly old apple tree standing watch over her abandoned garden. The arthritic knobby shadows dance with the shimmering streetlight. I think of a Drake's Apple Pie as my Converse high tops squash the fallen Macs beneath my feet. You see Mrs. Fletcher's yard is the easiest way to get to my Uncle's house unnoticed. There is a party going on at Uncle Billy's house, a celebration for the birth of my new cousin, little Vinnie, my Uncle Vinnie's new baby boy. I am going to be little Vinnie's godfather.

Uncle Billy is a bachelor, so all the parties are at his house. He always has a large stash of booze in his cellar, and that is our payoff. I have to get some booze for our "out to lunch punch" that we are having down the railroad tracks tonight. We almost won our last baseball game today against Cathedral High and that is as good as any reason to celebrate. Michael Paolini, who works at the local supermarket, already has the Gatorade poured into Kerry McDougal's huge cooler, and Eddie Visconti has the big Solo drinking cups and the sliced fruit all ready to go. All we need is Uncle Billy's booze and then it will be party time.

"You ready?" I say to Edmund who is trying to wipe the applesauce off his Keds.

"Yeah, let's go, these god damn mosquitoes are drinking more than I am and it's pissing me off."

Edmund and I have been friends since grammar school and are usually always together. He is a big- boned kid as Mom would say, and he is always getting in trouble because of his size and his red hair. At six feet two inches and a raggedy Andy mop, he can be spotted from three

blocks away. I don't really care what he looks like or how much trouble I get in when I am with him, he is my best friend. He helped me a lot when my dad died. He always has my back. We are going to steal the booze together and together we will get smashed.

It only takes two long strides from the apple tree to leap over the top of the chain link fence and land in Uncle Billy's yard. I sprint for the barrels that are kept under his back porch and squeeze in behind a grey one that smells like chicken grease. The fence rattles as Edmund swings one leg over and then the other, going slower than it seemed possible. You think he would just glide over the fence being such a big kid. Shaking my head, I watch him struggle to scale the five foot high fence. Edmund smirks when he reaches the barrels and shrugs his shoulders as he ducks behind one. I don't waste my breath teasing Edmund about his gracefulness. I just look at him, smile, hit my forehead with an open palm and shake my head. The sound of a stereo, loud voices and laughter swallows our unintended noise and I hope that we hadn't been seen. A sweet whiff of Columbian weed mingles with Honduran cigars and overwhelms the stink of the trash. I look over at Edmund and he sticks his head up over the barrel and inhales deeply, smiles and licks his puckered lips.

"Uncle Billy really knows how to have a party," he says.

"Be quiet," I reply.

Edmund is my mule. He will stay put while I go get the booze and he will help me carry whatever I can snatch to the "out to lunch punch". The red mop has to stay hidden. Michael, Kerry and Eddie are counting on us. They are waiting at the second tunnel on the railroad tracks for us to come back. I can't screw this up. I want to impress Kerri; she is a whole lot friendlier when she is drunk.

The cellar door is on the side of the house. My Uncle Billy always leaves the door open in case someone from the precinct needs to crash there for the night. He had built a small bedroom in the cellar so that guys could catch some rest between details and going on regular duty. I didn't tell ya, Uncle Billy is a cop, District 5's lead lieutenant. All my Uncles are Cops and so was my Dad. Uncle Billy has an open door policy in his cellar, first come, first serve and that my friend, is exactly what I am going to do, serve myself to some of Uncle Billy's booze. I look at Edmund; he lifts his hands above trash barrel and rubs them together. I smirk and keep low as I steal my way to the cellar door.

Slowly I progress up the driveway along the house's stone foundation. I make it to the cellar door. Slowly opening it, the hinges shriek. My head darts back and forth, but I see no one. Quickly, I duck inside and tear for a corner, where I settle in to listen. The upstairs floor shakes with the beat of a George Thorogood song. My jackpot is just off to the right under the cellar stairs and I can see bottles of all shapes, sizes and colors glimmering in the dusty cellar. It all looks so sweet. *We are going to party tonight!* I shoot out from the corner and make a direct dash towards the wall behind the spare bedroom. Crouching down, ready to spring, I hear a noise, so I pull back behind the wall. Footsteps are echoing off the stairs, someone is coming down. Shit, I can't get caught, Uncle Billy will kill me. I bring my fist to my mouth and wait. Curiosity overcomes my fear and slowly I peak around the corner. Uncle Vinnie is coming down the stairs with some girl. She stumbles down the stairs following him. I have never seen this girl before, *weird*. Her clothes are tight and short, but compliment her body nicely. She is tall and lean and looks really young. She is wearing too much makeup and cheap looking jewelry, but it looks pretty good on her. Her blond hair and pale skin highlight her light blue eyes that shine through the dimness of the cellar. I can't stop staring at her eyes, they are striking. I glance from her to

Vinnie. What the hell is she doing with Uncle Vinnie and what the hell is Uncle Vinnie doing with her? A sudden glow illuminates Uncle Vinnie's face as he lights a pipe. I crouch further down and back up further behind the wall. I slowly sneak a glance and see smoke rising from the bowl of the pipe, but can't believe it. The girl with the amazing eyes is bouncing up and down on both feet and is holding her hand up waiting for the pipe.

"Come on, give it to me, give to me," she says.

"Take it easy, baby, there is plenty. I scored a lot of this shit in a bust down on Washington Street. The punks never knew if we were goin to bust them or beat em. They were lucky we let em go" Uncle Vinnie says, with a weird smile on his face. Uncle Vinnie passes it to her as the smoke curls out of his lips and he reaches into his pocket and pulls out a plastic baggie. The girl takes a long hit, closes her eyes and passes the pipe back to Uncle Vinnie who places something into the bowl.

"Good shit, huh?" Uncle Vinnie says and looks at the girl with an even weirder look.

I suck in a deep breath feeling nauseated from the smell. It doesn't smell like weed. I peer at the door, and I tell ya, I almost run for it, my legs won't respond, but my mind is racing. I don't want to see anymore. I just want to get out of here. I can't believe it. The sounds of them inhaling and the clicking of the lighter are slowly replaced by wet smacking sounds and sickening groans. Uncle Vinnie is grunting and the girl is moaning. I put my hands over my ears and press as hard as I can, but I can still hear them. *This sucks!* I shake my head back and forth. I can't believe this is happening. Forget the booze; I just want out of here.

Suddenly Uncle Vinnie yells, "What the... You little bitch, give me my rocks back!"

"I don't have em," she says seductively.

"Bullshit, there is no one else here but you and me, give me my rocks back."

“I don’t have em, Vinnie, I promise. Really, look around; maybe you dropped them when we were getting it on.”

“Okay... help me look. I can’t leave this shit around for my brother to find.”

I slide even farther into the shadows, hoping they wouldn’t look over here. *Shit what if they come over here?* I rub my face with my sweaty hands and press my back further into the wall. I look towards the door but Vinnie is in the way, he will see me if I make a break for it. Everything in the cellar looks so different. It’s brighter and they are going to find me. Uncle Vinnie is coming towards me. A piercing pain stabs my stomach and I place my head between my knees. Rocking back and forth I mumble “Oh no, Oh no, shit, fuck, damn”. My lips are trembling. I slowly raise my head and feel wetness brush my cheek. My vision is blurry. *Please no!*

“Hey, come back here you slimy bitch, you did take it,” Uncle Vinnie shouts. The rapid clicking of her three inch heels is quickly followed by Uncle Vinnie’s loafers slapping on the concrete floor. She screams. Then a muffled sound is followed by several thuds and then a loud thump. I gradually lean towards the edge of the wall; all I can hear is music, nothing but music. I continue to move closer to the edge, then stop. I hear a rustle of fabric followed by a slight groan. Then the sound of someone brushing off their clothes comes from the direction of the stairs. Taking a deep breath, I slowly peak around the corner. I see Uncle Vinnie slowly getting up and looking around, but the girl didn’t move. Her light blue eyes are looking directly at me; I jump back behind the wall. Closing my eyes, I try to shake the image of those brilliant light blue eyes. I cover my mouth with my hand and bite my upper lip. I can’t believe this is happening. Please let it all be a hallucination or a dream. A scraping sound causes me to open my eyes. Crawling back to the edge of the wall, I gradually get my head around the corner and see Uncle

Vinnie dragging the girl across the floor. My stomach feels like right after you puke, and I taste the cafeteria burritos that I had for lunch. I swallow hard and want to spit. Uncle Vinnie is dragging the girl into the spare room. I pull my head back and sit down hard. Covering my face with both of my hands, I suck in a deep breath of sour air and hold it. I am shaking now and freaked out that Uncle Vinnie will hear me. *Please God just get me the hell out of here.* Uncle Vinnie shuts the door to the room and pauses. I feel as if he is looking right through the wall at me. His breathing is heavy and deep. Each thump of his footsteps on the stairs shoots a blow through me, echoing in my head and passing through my body with a shudder. The lock on the upstairs door clicks like a trigger.

I don't know what to do. Man, I am telling ya, I don't know what to do. I want to check on the girl, but I have to get out of here. My body won't respond. I start to tremble. Is she still alive? Will Uncle Vinnie come back? Shit, what do I do? My stomach feels as if it has lurched up into my throat and I stifle a gag. I am scared and have to get out of here. I'm sorry girl, but I don't even know you. Damn those brilliant blue eyes. Praying for strength I roll over to my knees, scramble to my feet and head straight for the door. I fall, slamming my knees on the steps. I didn't worry any more about making noise, it isn't even a thought. I am out of here. Crawling out onto the driveway, I stand up. Twisting my head both left and right, I forget where I am, Shit. A sudden movement catches my eye and I jump and let out a muffled squeal.

Edmund has come out from under the porch and says, "What are you doing, what took so long and where's the booze?" I stare at him and then tear down into the backyard leaping over the fence. Running until I make it to the railroad tracks; I scramble into the bushes and close my eyes. I can't stop seeing her light blue eyes. Lying down in the leaves with my knees tightly

pressed into my chest, I roll on to my side, and cover my face with my hands. They will not stop shaking. I start to cry and think of my Dad.

It is Saturday and I am playing my final baseball game of the season. We are playing the stuck- up players of Cathedral High. Uncle Vinnie is here, he is always here. The crowd is sparse, mostly family and a few senior citizens who had nothing better to do. Our team isn't very good, not as good as when Uncle Vinnie, my Dad and Uncle Billy had played. The old timers in the stands still idolized Uncle Vinnie and bolstered about the glory days. Uncle Vinnie's pitching had won the world series for our school three years in a row. The only year they had lost was the year my Dad had died in "the accident". Now everyone expected me to be the next Uncle Vinnie. Uncle Vinnie had taught me how to throw my signature four seam fastball. It sunk away from the batters when I threw it right, which didn't happen enough. It is this pitch that helped me make the Varsity team, as a backup closer. I am trying to use it now. The game is close. We are down by two runs, and I am on the mound.

"Remember to keep your elbow above your shoulder and position your feet," Uncle Vinnie yells from the stands. "You got this, Tommy boy."

My mouth is dry and full of dirt and I catch a whiff of stale popcorn. I glance towards the stands looking for Kerri, but I don't see her. Hey, a guy can dream right? I shake off the curveball call from the catcher, suck in a whole bunch of dust and let my fastball fly. The batter connects and I watch the ball sail towards the fence. I knew it was gone and tossed my glove at the mound. I rip my hat off my head and rub my hand across my scalp, staring down the batter as he circles the bases. No one on his team says anything as they line up to shake his hand. I stare

at the other team's prissy players, just daring one to say something, but none did. The rest of the game is a blur, but I finally manage to get the third out. Uncle Vinnie meets me at the gate.

"Tough break, those guys are good hitters," says Uncle Vinnie.

"I should have used my curve ball more," I say.

"Your curveball sucks," Uncle Vinnie says with a smile. I smile back.

"Listen, I want to ask you something. It would mean a lot to me if you would be the Godfather to little Vinnie."

"Really, me, yeah ..., wait, what does a Godfather do?"

"Just make sure he goes to church and does the right thing, you know, like help him out and such, it's not hard. Your Grandma knows all bout it, she can clue you in. Auntie Maria and I really want you to be the Godfather of little Vinnie. What do ya say? "

"Yeah, Ok, Thanks Uncle Vinnie."

"Now come here and give me a hug, I got to get back to work. Don't worry bout the game, we will work on that fastball and you'll have them swingin away next year. You need a ride?"

"No thanks, I am hooking up with Edmund and we're going to the park to shoot some hoops. See ya later, and thanks Uncle Vinnie."

"You got it kid; I will see ya tomorrow for the Sunday meal."

"Okay, Bye Uncle Vinnie."

Sunday afternoon dinner is a family tradition. All of my family comes to Grandmas and you have better have a great excuse for not making it. This family tradition goes back for hundreds of years. That is what Grandma says anyway. I told my Mom that I am sick and can't

come, but she says that I don't have a temperature so I have to come. She says that I would feel better when I get there. I know I won't. I want to tell her what has happened, but I just can't. I didn't get home last night until late. I had stayed at the tracks and finally left because if I wasn't here to go to Grandmas when she woke up, Grandma would have called my Uncles. I don't want to see Uncle Vinnie. I can't look at him. I'm scared.

I hide in my grandma's back room and go unnoticed for awhile because everyone is enthralled with the new baby. That is until Edmund comes to the door. Grandma comes and gets me and asks if I am feeling better. She tells me that Edmund is here. I tell Grandma that I am feeling better and ask if I can go out to talk to Edmund.

Grandma looks at me with her right eyebrow raised, you know like Grandmas can do and say, "Okay, if you are feeling better, but be sure to be back for dinner."

"Thanks Grandma, I love you," I say as I give her a quick hug, then shoot down the hallway and bolt outside without even looking in the parlor. Edmund follows me and starts to say something, but I grab him by the arm and take off down the street. He looks at me with his face all scrunched up and when we finally stop he says,

"What the hell is eating you? Where did you go last night and what happened at your Uncle Billy's. Man you looked like shit when you came out of the cellar and then you disappeared without saying a word, what the fuck is up?"

I glanced back up the street to see if anyone is coming and say,

"Come on" tipping my head towards the tracks. We walk up to the first tunnel before I say anything.

"Man, you are weirding me out, freak boy, what is going on?"

We arrived at the second tunnel and I say, “I’m screwed, I saw something happen last night and I don’t know what to do. I still can’t believe this is happening and that it is true. I am scared shit and if I say anything everyone is going to hate me. I’m screwed.” I closed my eyes and sit on the rail. I look both ways down the tracks.

Edmund stands over me and says, “Dude it can’t be that bad, we have gotten out of some pretty shitty places before. What happened, what’s going on? Tell what’s going on!”

“I can’t get you involved. This is too screwed up man. My family is going to hate me if I tell what happened and I can’t just let it go, it is too screwed up.”

“Talk to me bro. I can help you. Come on, I can see you are whacked out. Let me in. It can’t be worse than losing your Dad and we got through that. It took some serious drinking, but we got through it together.”

The rail starts to vibrate and I feel a slight breeze, so we get off the rail. The train is coming and we stand in a long silence while it passes. I know I have to go back to Grandmas and pretend to eat. If I don’t then Uncle Vinnie will come looking for me and try to talk to me. I don’t know if I can stand it. I am scared about how I will react. I kept thinking of the girl. *I can’t do this.*

“Listen, I’ve got to go. We can talk later and I’ll tell you everything. I’ve got to get back or they’ll be pissed.”

“Wait a second, you sure? Edmund stares, then rubs his red mop and looks towards the ground.

“Man, you are scaring me. Come on, don’t leave me. We need to talk?”

“I will meet you here tonight at seven. I should be able to get away by then.” I take a quick look up and down the tracks then take off running before he can say anything else. I want

to tell him, but not now. I hope that I can sneak in the back door of Grandma's without the sound of my heart beat giving me away.

I did it. With all the attention on the baby and pretending to be sick, I am able to keep away from Uncle Vinnie for most of the time. I tell them that I don't want to get the baby sick. I don't really want to look at him. Not the baby, Uncle Vinnie. I don't want to be near him. He is nothing that I thought he was. I had looked up to him and he was more of a Dad to me than my own dad had been. My dad was a drunk and shot himself because he couldn't handle life. Now my favorite Uncle is a druggie and a killer. He is screwing around on Auntie Maria and lying to everyone the whole time. But look at everyone here, how they love him so much. The baseball star, the decorated Policeman and now a new loving Dad, I hate him so much. Why did he have to be like him, like my Dad, another friggin loser? I thought he was better. What do I do now? Can I tell everyone what happened? Tell them what he is really like and screw everything up. Why not, I am good at screwing things up. Will they even believe me? Even if they do believe me, what good will it do, if I tell. It will just screw up the family and little Vinnie won't have a Dad like me. The girl is dead and she was probably some whore anyway. She was pretty though and those light blue eyes, I can't stop seeing them and hearing her scream. *This sucks*. She was someone's daughter and niece or something. Shit, she shouldn't have been at Uncle Billy's house, the stupid bitch. I feel sweat running down my back and I wipe my forehead. I rub my face and clench my teeth. My back hurts really badly. I have to get out of here. Nobody can see me like this. It will lead to questions and I don't know if I can hold it in any longer. I will meet Edmund and tell him everything. He can tell me what to do. He will know what to do. He knew

what to do when my Dad coped out. I sneak out the back door and sprint to the tracks. I am going to tell Edmund.

I can hear everyone partying up at the second tunnel. They sound as if they are already drunk and having a good time. Edmund is late. It is already seven twenty and he hasn't shown up. I am sitting on the rail thinking about the shit I am in. Why did I have to go for the booze? I knew it was no good. It had killed my father and messed up my family. It never really did me any good, mostly just got me sick or in trouble. I wonder if the girl with the light blue eyes drank booze or if she was just a crack head. Did the booze get her to start on crack? Man she was pretty, what a waste. I can still see those light blue eyes shining so bright. She looked so beautiful and peaceful. I feel a soft breeze and hear a dull repetitive sound. It is soothing. She must know I'm sorry and that I couldn't have helped her, right? I hear my name being called and I see her eyes, her brilliant blue eyes. They are getting bigger and brighter. Man they are beautiful. I am so sorry, I screwed up, blue eyes, I was afraid and didn't know what to do. I should have helped you. Again I hear my name, Tommy, Tommy, but something isn't right. I turn towards the sound of my name. I see Edmond and his face is twisted in terror. I will tell him everything and he will make it all okay. Edmund will understand why I didn't help her, why I didn't help save her. I turn back towards the brilliant flash of blue and hear Edmund scream.

333 Cornell Ave.

The bell clangs and I shoot out of my seat. Looking straight ahead and trying to blend in, I grab my backpack and make it to the hallway, cut the line and hide behind George, the tallest kid in my class. I stare at the back of George's converse high tops, my hands are in my pockets all clammy and my right leg is quivering. I can't stay after. I am the fastest kid at the Mozart Elementary School and we are playing the stuck up kids from Holy Name Catholic School in a football game today. I can't stay after. Mrs. Mahoney is talking to Annie when the line starts to move towards the exit. Seeing my freedom through the front doors, I push George forward and he crashes into Shannon Dunn who smiles sweetly and then stomps on George's high top. George winces, clenches his teeth and stares at her while his face transforms into instant sunburn.

"You can't hit a girl," I say with a wink while jumping into the back of the line. George tries to grab me, but right then Mr. Oakman releases the walkers, and we all scamper out into the school yard. George is right behind me but I know he won't catch me. George gives up and doesn't even try to run after me, because he knows that I have to wait for him at the bottom of Maple Street, because I am afraid of Joe Finn. Joe Finn is a big middle schooler who doesn't like me and is always trying to beat me up. He won't mess with me if George is with me, because George is bigger than him.

"Come get what you got coming to ya," George yells as he approaches me on the corner.

"Come on, chill out, I didn't mean to push you into your girlfriend."

"You really want a beating, don't ya boy?"

“What, you can’t take a joke? Come on, Mrs. Mahoney was gunning for me and I had to get out for the game. You are playing aren’t ya?” “Come on let me slide this one time, please.”

“This once? I am always letting you slide. Ok, but only if I get those hostess desserts your Mom gives you in your lunch, for the rest of the week!”

“Really?” That ain’t right.”

“Do you want to walk by Joe’s house by your lonesome, pretty boy?”

“Ok, Ok, it’s a deal, but if it’s Twinkies, I get one of them.”

“All right, let’s go.”

I always feel better with George. He lives across the street from me, and we are close. I have his back and he has mine. I don’t have a brother and neither does he. We are like brothers, but we don’t look anything alike. He is big with dark skin and black frizzy hair, smells like spicy food. I am small with light brown hair, freckles everywhere and smell like the strawberry shampoo my Mom makes me use. I am fast, he is slow. He is smart, and I am not so smart. He is brave, and I am well, fast. Joe Finn could kiss my you- know-what because we are walking right by his house, and he won’t do a thing about it. Nobody messes with my friend. When I spy Joe on his porch a shiver passes across my back and pressure starts to build in my groin. The end of Maple Street looks so far away. I mumble a silent prayer my Mom had taught me, hoping it will keep Joe on his porch. I pick up the pace, look all around at my escape routes and glance back at George reassuringly, slowing my pace down in order to stay close to him. Joe starts to move, but sees George and goes back up on the stoop.

We make it by the animal’s house and off of Maple Street. I am running back and forth across Cornell Ave, jumping on and off the sidewalk curbs, laughing and singing “Joe won’t

mess with me, the wimp.” Only three blocks to go, and we will be home and then off to the football game to whoop some Catholic boy butt.

“You ready to kick some butt?” I say as I tap George on the back of his head.

He grabs me and says,

“Yeah, starting with your scrawny one.”

We are goofing around and before we realize it, were we are at number 333 Cornell Ave. That’s when, I hear him coming.

“Oh shit.” A shudder races down my spine and my muscle tense sending a sharp pain to my neck. My brain fires all cylinders and my legs start to move before I realize it. He knows he has us and is gaining fast. I look back at George and see fear twisting his facial muscles into someone unrecognizable. His face is suddenly white no more sunburn features or dark olive shine, he is whiter than me. His face starts to quiver and spittle flies out the side of his mouth. He is now running full tilt. George’s look gives me an added boost of speed and I take off, not daring to look back anymore.

How could we have forgotten? We never forgot. Every day we sprint past number 333 Cornell Ave because of him. We could outrun him if we have a head start. Mr. Burchill’s beagle is always out for blood. Every day he waits on the raised staircase of 333 for us. He always tries to ambush us and won’t bark until after we have out run him and made it to our street. Then he won’t shut up until we are in our houses. He isn’t by any means a big dog and there isn’t anything especially different about his looks. I am not even sure if he is a full blood beagle. He is that cute kind of pudgy dog with no signifying marks, but he is mean and determined when he comes after you. Today he has the jump on us and we are screwed.

A scream makes me stumble and I almost fall. George screams again and I hear my name and it scares the crap out of me. Slowing down and looking back, I can see George's panicked face with wild teary eyes darting all around, its first time I saw George cry. He spins around and I see the beagle's jaws clamped on George's butt. I cover my ears and close my eyes trying to hide the vicious snarls and growls. I start to cry. Opening my eyes and I see the dog jerking his head from side to side trying to pull off a piece of George's butt. The dog is hanging by his jaws in the air and spins around like a horse on a merry go round as George twists trying to shake him off.

"Tommy," George screams.

My heart is pounding in my chest and my ears seem to be covered with plastic wrap. I realize that I still have my hands over my ears and quickly pull them away. The growling now sounds like my Mom's electric mixer. My feet are pointing towards my house, but my eyes are frozen on George and the dog.

"Get this thing off me, Oh..., help me," George screams, "Tommy, help me!"

George is trying to hit the dog with his fists but when he turns to strike the dog, it flies out of reach. I see blood running down George's leg and his eyes are huge and darting everywhere looking for help. I am too afraid to move. My best friend is getting mauled and I just stand there watching. I want to run home and get help, but I am afraid to move. *What if the dog decides to come after me if I move?* George has spun around closer to me. Tears are streaming down his face and I can see he is in a lot of pain. *Why can't I be brave like George, he needs me?* I bite my lip hard, suck in a deep breath and rush forward towards George and the beagle. I am almost on top of them when I spot the dog's eyes roll on my direction. The dog doesn't let go and seems to renew his attack on George's butt. I let out a loud yell and jump at the dog. Swinging my leg up

as hard as I can, I plant my Adidas right under the dog's ribcage. I hear a whoosh and an ear splitting yelp as the dog flies through the air. He lands hard on the sidewalk and glances up at me. I swear I can see the fear spread quickly across his features as he gets his legs under him, glares into my eyes again and then quickly retreats to his raised staircase.

George is standing rock still and silent with his jaw hanging and his eyes bugging out staring at me. A spasm shoots up my back and escapes through the top of my scalp. My foot starts to throb and I taste blood in my mouth. I look at George who is holding his butt and staring blankly towards the stairway at 333 Cornell Ave.

My head keeps turning back and forth between George and the stairway. I don't know if Mister Burchill's beagle is building his courage for another attack and all I can hear is George crying and groaning.

"Let's get out of here before he comes back," I say while moving towards George. "Are you Okay?"

"I don't know, I just want to go home," George says.

"Man, how did we forget about that damn dog?"

We hobble down the street and I run ahead to get George's mother. George's father is home and he comes out on to the sidewalk looks at George then scoops him up and puts him in their car. George's father is asking me questions, but not really listening to my answers. I see George's face through the side window of his Dad's car as he pulls out of the driveway. I wipe my nose on my sleeve and force a fake smile. I feel the tears stream down my face as the car fades into the distance. I run across the street to my house. My foot really hurts.

The next day George's dad calls and tells me to come on over. When I see George we both break out laughing and don't stop until I almost choke. George's mother and father are laughing too. I know then that he is going to be Okay.

"How are you doing?" I ask him when I finally can catch my breath. My jaw hurts from all the laughing.

"Ok, my ass hurts."

"George!" says his mother.

"Sorry Mom, my derriere hurts, that's what they call it at the hospital" he says. We all laugh again and I start to relax. "

"My arm hurts too. I had to get a tetanus shot that hurt more than the stitches."

"Stitches... How many stitches did you get?"

"How many did I get, Dad?"

"Twenty-one."

"Wow, I don't want to see them, thanks anyway."

"How do you know I was goin to show them to ya?"

"You can save it till school Monday for show and tell, I am sure Shannon will want to see them."

"Now boys, knock it off or I will send Tommy home and you to your room," says George's Mom.

"They killed the dog," says George.

"Wait... What?"

“They had to put the dog to sleep, Tommy. This isn’t the first time Mr. Burchill’s dog has bitten someone and the Police think that he is too dangerous to keep around anymore,” George’s Dad says.

“Wow, what did Mr. Burchill do? I asked.

“I am sure he is upset, but the dog is dangerous and we can’t take a chance on someone else getting hurt,” says George’s Dad.

I look at George and tried to hide my sadness, but I can see the water in his eyes too.

“George needs to get some rest Tommy, why don’t you go home and come back tomorrow, I am sure George will be feeling better tomorrow,” says George’s Mom.

I didn’t look at George and said, “Ok, I hope you feel better George, see ya tomorrow.”

George didn’t look at me when he said, “Yeah see ya tomorrow and Thanks, you saved my life.”

I banged into the kitchen chair on my way out and I wasn’t smiling as I cross the street to my house. Now that Mr. Burchill’s beagle is gone, everything seems so different.

Shadows on the Threshold

The pop from the tab on the beer can makes me jump. Sweat and cigar smoke invade my room causing me to shiver. He is home from work and the shadows of his boots don't move from under my door's threshold. I listen to his raspy breath. Staring at the poster of Rocky Balboa on the back of my door I wonder why I can't be like Rocky. Why I can't fight back. Everything has changed since Mom died. He isn't worried about her idle threats anymore. I want my dad to come in and be close, but not the way he likes. He doesn't care anymore. Now he is different, but no one believes me. They say I have the problem. What the hell did they know, their mother didn't die and they can't see the shadow. They think I am the drunk. At eighteen I have drank few times and gotten into some trouble, but I never drink like him. I am never going to be like him. I pull my covers closer to my face and stare at the poster on my door. I really miss my mom. I miss him like he used to be. I don't want it anymore, regardless of what he says about missing mom. I just want him to be a dad, my dad. The shadow of his boots cross the threshold and approach my bed. I turn away and look at the open window. I want to leave, to get away. I promise myself I will as I feel the cool draft when he removes the covers off my bed.

This jerk really thinks he is for real. Court- appointed and probably fresh out of law school. He is wearing a two button navy blue suit and reeks of Polo. I notice the leather briefcase with a gold monogram and some fancy Italian shoes. He is rifling through question after question that really don't matter. I pretend to listen and tried to match my facial expressions with the ones that flash across his face. All they want is to get out of here. I got busted again, but the cop started it. Today is just another wasted day and a mild inconvenience. I will be out of here shortly with

another slap on the wrist. I have five bucks in my pocket and can't wait to drink away my hangover.

"Just let me do the talking," says, Mr. Court-Appointed.

"Ok," I say.

We have to wait awhile before they call my name. Mr. Court-Appointed turns to me and says,

"Don't forget, let me do the talking. You don't say anything."

"Yeah, Ok, got it," I reply.

He was right. I didn't do much talking, but neither did he. Judge Murphy pretty much had everything to say. Judge Murphy is a good looking clean-cut physically fit man in his forties, young for a judge. He looks all regal with his long black robe and chiseled features as he peers out over his court. Rumor has it he is the cousin of Representative Crowley, and that is why he was appointed so young. He's okay. He had gone easy on me before and I am hoping he is in a good mood. I swallow hard and lick my lips. I stand as straight as I can and look directly at the Judge. Judge Murphy doesn't look happy and the clerk is whispering something in his ear as he hands him the docket. I take my hands out of my pockets and cross them on my chest, then let them dangle at my sides. Mr. Court-Appointed starts to speak in front of the large oak bench, but is silenced by Murphy. He shuts his mouth, pushes both of his lips outward and looks at the floor. *He won't get his glory verdict this time.*

"William, I told you last time if I had to deal with you again that your chances were over. Another assault and drunk and disorderly you cannot seem to stay out of trouble, William. I am seeing your face in my courtroom all too often. These are serious charges and you are lucky no one got hurt. I do believe that you need some direction William and you need to receive some

help with your drinking. I am sentencing you to three months at Bridgewater State Hospital to dry out, and get the help you need.”

I stare at him and swallow hard. I swallow again and look at the clerk. Mr. Court-Appointed smiles and says, “Your honor, William is just having some difficulties at home, perhaps...”

“That will be all, counselor. I am familiar with William and see no need for further discussion.”

“Next case,” calls the clerk. Mr. Court-Appointed pauses, shuffles his papers, looks at me then turns and walks towards the hallway. I look at some dude sitting on the bench then back at Judge Murphy. The clerk extends his arm, pointing towards the hallway and says, “Go see your lawyer; he has papers for you to sign.”

I don’t reply. I turn and walk to the hallway. “What the fuck just happened? You are supposed to be my lawyer for Christ’s sake. I can’t go to Bridgy, that place is full of nut cases. The place is creepy, they rubber hose you and stuff. I’m not nuts. You have got to do something.”

“There is nothing I can do. You heard him. Judge Murphy is determined to get you help. I don’t believe that Bridgewater State Hospital is that bad.”

“Help? That’s not help. It’s hell.”

“Well ...wait here, I am sure the judge has your best interest in mind. I will talk to the clerk and see what I can do. I need to get the proper forms when he is done.”

I sit down on the bench and shake my head. I put my hands over my face and inhale deeply. Lifting my head up, I fold my hands in prayer. I don’t talk to God much but I say, louder

than I realize, “Come on, God; just get me out of this one, I promise I will do better. Please, I promise I will only drink on weekends, and only beer. Please, God, Please, just this once.”

I don’t know if he heard me, but my shoulders relax and my breathing comes easier. I start to look around. Maybe I should just run for it. I could go to New Hampshire and stay up in the mountains and camp until the winter, then crash with friends. They would probably never find me. Or Timmy’s uncle has that crabbing boat down in the Keys, maybe I could ask him to give me a job. Ah shit, this sucks. I don’t want to go to Bridgewater. I can’t go to Bridgewater.

Mr. Court-Appointed comes back. He stands over me and puffs out his scrawny chest, “Ok, here are your options. I have spoken to the clerk about your fear of going to Bridgewater. He said that Judge Murphy is tired of seeing you and he wants you to get the help you need. The charges will be dropped and they will clear your record, both juvie and adult if you join the service. They believe that it will help you with your drinking problem and it will do you some good to get some discipline.”

“What like the army or something?”

“Yeah, like the army or something, but it has to be within thirty day from now or there is no deal. I think you should do it; it is a chance to get your life together. You can learn a skill and it will help you to become a responsible young man. I looked at your file and you do not have a lot going for you. You probably won’t be able to get a decent job with your record. As your counsel, I recommend you take this deal.”

“A clean record, no nothing on it and I don’t have to go to Bridgey.”

“Yes, but you need to let me know now. The clerk is getting ready to leave. He is doing me a favor. You have to settle this now if you want the deal.”

I look at his face, I can see what I think is sincerity. I close my eyes and rub my forehead. I want out of here and this could be my chance. I take a deep breath and hold it. Slowly releasing it through pursed lips, I stomp my foot on the wooden floor and say a bit too loud, “Damn it, Shit, I can’t decide this fast. I got to think bout it.”

“No time, it is either yes or no?”

“I don’t really have a choice, do I? I ain’t going to Bridgewater. I can’t go to Bridgewater. They won’t let me go somewhere else?”

“Nope”

“... Okay”

“Alright, come with me, we will talk with the clerk and you need to sign some papers.”

As I follow Mr. Court-Appointed, I notice that he is taller than I originally thought, and I still don’t know his name.

Today is day one hundred and four. Figures, two months out of A.I.T. and a war breaks out. Just my luck, now I am assigned to guard this shitty bridge in the middle of nowhere. The bridge spans a dry river bed that leads to a village twelve clicks to the north. I am deployed with 1st battalion, 21st infantry regiment, Alpha Company, and we are babysitting a shitty bridge. I shake my head and move a couple of feet to the right so I will still be in the shade of the humvee. I settle in the best I can. It is hot. All I can see on the horizon is the rippling heat waves. I am hoping for a mirage so I can leave this God forsaken place, if only for a minute. The dry air and heat from the sun keeps the sweat running down the back of my flak jacket. It reminds me that I am not going anywhere, here I am, and here I stay. If only Mr. Court-Appointed could see my now. My camies are as starched as his two button suit and my boots shine brighter than his fancy

Italian shoes. The arid wind stirs the sand and creates illusions that keep me on edge. The silence is only broken by a shift of cloth, a scuff of skin, or the clearing of a throat. I drain my first canteen and say a silent thanks to Osowski's sister for sending us the Kool Aid to mix with this tepid water. I wonder what she looks like. Osowski is tall with blond stubble that used to be hair, walks like he is balancing a book on his head. I lose my erotic daydream of his sister when he realizes I am staring at him and turns to me and smiles and says, "Only eight hours to go." He reminds me of an ostrich, an ostrich that talks; I finally got my minute away from this place and crack a grateful smile.

"What, you got sunstroke already? We are right here until zero six hundred," says the Sarge.

"Why are we watching the bridge and not patrolling the zone, Sarge?" I ask.

"The LT said to stay put until further notice, so settle in boys it's going to be a beautiful night," the Sarge says with a grin.

I grab a handful of sand and watch it pour slowly through my fingers as I wonder if they too, have secrets. I don't like the night. All the shit happens at night. I look at Osowski again. He is okay. Osowski can drive like a son of bitch. He pushes our governmental shit box to the height of NASCAR performance when the shit hits the fan. He claims to have a 65 Shelby Mustang at his home in California. I fucking believe him. Nobody else drives in our squad, just Osowski, because the Sarge says so. I can barely see the Sarge's face; the Irish sheik has a cloth over his head and looks like Ali Baba. The Sarge is always covering up, so you can't tell if he is watching or not. He is like a shadow, always there in the day and somehow still there at night. The Sarge is old. He is pushing forty something and knows his shit. Rumor has it he is an iron worker from Ohio, but no one knows for sure. Sarge doesn't talk much.

“What? You got to be shitting me, Sarge. I’m hungry and this field shit is putrid,” says Osowski.

“That’s good stuff, especially the chicken gumbo,” Billy says while smiling and licking his lips.

“Ah, shit,” Osowski says, pulling his helmet down over his head and turning his back to the vee.

Billy is from the poor part of South Carolina and enjoys whatever food he can get. He tells us that he had worked on a meat truck that followed the welfare checks. His job was to yell out “Buy some meats today, buy some meats today. We got fatback, turkey wings and gristle.” Our gunner, Pogo, can’t get enough of Billy’s chant and has him yell it when we pass through the villages. Pogo laughs and laughs until he pisses himself. It never gets old. That southern drawl echoing thru the deserts of the ancient Middle East, go figure. I glance over and see Billy smirking and wonder what kind of food he is thinking of. Pogo is trying hard to clean the sand from the 50 cal. He is a Rhode Island rich kid who is rebelling against his dad. He barely made boot camp and is about 20lbs overweight. Pogo is short with a doughy complexion, kind of like the Pillsbury Dough Man. His uniform has cuffs everywhere and he wears those stylish army spectacles. He is no formidable sight until he gets behind the fifty. Then he is like a super hero. Man, that boy can shoot. He can hit his target even as he bounces up and down like a pogo stick when Osowski is tearing ass through a hot zone.

I need to clean my weapon and check my supplies, but that means going inside the humvee. It is dark inside and it is like climbing in a furnace with all your winter gear and I am already soaked through. I don’t like the dark, it reminds me of home. The more Kool Aid flavored water I ingest, the wetter I get. It is a funny thing you learn about water out here. It is an

adhesive because it causes my uniform to stick to my skin, it's a lubricant because when your hands are always wet, shit slides right through them, and it is a coolant even when it is warm, like it is now. I take another sip out of my canteen, feeling the mixture flow slowly down my throat and settle into my stomach. I thrust my stomach forward and hear the swishing sound inside. I smile, it sounds cool, and so I do it again. A grunt from the Sarge stops my little self indulgence. I shift, covered up, and settle in trying not to think of the incoming night. I smell sweat and cigar smoke and moan as I turn my head away from the smell.

It is my watch and I stand over Sarge. Darkness is everywhere and I recognize the stench. I wonder why he is different. He didn't seem to be drinking as much and now he is around a lot more. He was nicer to me just like he used to be when Mom was alive. I just want him to be like he used to be. I suck in a deep breath and the stink overtakes me. I place my hand over my nose and mouth to stop the smell. I gag, and then swallow hard. I close my eyes tight and see the Rocky poster on the back of my door. I squeeze my bayonet tight, holding it like I did when I held my bedpost. Opening my eyes I move closer so that I can straddle over him. I move the bayonet into my left hand and wipe the sweat from my right palm across my thigh. I switch it back tightening my grip and squeeze the handle until my arm starts to shake. I glance back and forth, nobody stirs. It's dark and it's silent, it was always silent, except for the sounds of his raspy breath.

"Bastard," I say as I lunge forward. I see his eyes flick open and he kicks his leg upward. Pain grasps my groin as I fall sideways and slam into the ground. I can't breathe and my chest burns. I squeeze my eyes tight and drop the bayonet. I can hear him yelling but can't understand what he says. "You bastard, you didn't love me, you didn't love me, you fuckin drunk," I

scream. Opening my eyes I see him standing over me, the bastard. I grab for the bayonet and I try to get to him. The butt of a M16 comes at me and then all goes black.

It is not so bad here. My room never gets dark and they don't think I am a drunk. It smells, but not of sweat and cigars. I am still in the service, just in a different way and I don't have to go home. Osowski comes to visit me. I want him to come in and visit too, but not the way he likes.

The Emergency Exit

The grinding metal and the gush of wind propel Adam into the darkness. The grease and oil camouflage his skin, only the white of his eyes betray his sanctuary. This underground dungeon is home and his mother told him to stay hidden. The ache in his gut drives him to defy his mother's wishes. It is becoming too dangerous to rely on her any more. There are always scraps up at the diner's dumpster, and he hasn't eaten for two days. He knows he has to be careful because they are around. It is early morning and that is when they emerge from the shadows. As soon as the red train passes, Adam shoots out of the niche and crosses the tracks aware of the fat rail. His mother warned him about the fat rail. She said that whatever touched it became bacon. He isn't sure what bacon is, but he knows it isn't good.

The emergency exit is dark. Adam had broken the light bulbs and no one had yet come to repair them. Adam waits at the bottom of the stairs listening. He can smell the human waste that litters the exit. Hunger forces him to go on. Adam watches the rats. Silently they cling to the shadows and only stir when no one is near. They are his guide. Adam darts outside into the alley and hurls himself over the dumpster's side burrowing deep in the refuse. He feels warm and secure and the heady aroma envelopes him. Knowing that he cannot linger, he quickly snatches a half eaten Italian sub, some spoiled fruit and returns to the shadows of the evil smelling exit.

Adam knows the subway intimately. It is his territory. He sprints across the platform and jumps into the pit. From the safety of the shadows Adam notices a body lying face down on the graffiti laden bench. Adam covers his face with his hands and sighs deeply. He clenches his jaw tightly choking back a cry. He knows who is lying on the bench and that she is drunk again. His mother, Madeline Miller. She is supposed to be looking for work to get them a place to live. She is always promising to get sober, even going to Alcoholic Anonymous meetings, but she won't

give it up. The booze is why they live here. Adam knows he has to get her to their safe place. They will come and everything will be screwed up again. Adam has to move quickly, the trains run every ten minutes and he can feel the slight breeze of one approaching. He sprints down the tracks and crouches under the yellow safety strip on the platform edge. He scuttles to the edge and freezes. Adam slowly lifts his head and peers over the safety strip. The transit police are closing in on his mother. Radio static jolts Adam and he notices a transit cop standing directly above him. He drops and curls himself into the fetal position squeezing his eyes shut, hoping to vanish. The commotion on the platform and the vibrations of the approaching train compel Adam to move. He tries to run crouched over under the platform edge, but falls, tripping on the ballast. Adam glares back at the approaching headlights, lets out a yelp, jumps up and bolts down the tracks, quickly disappearing into the familiar shadows of his subway sanctuary.

Adam's eyes are wide open refusing to blink as he stares at the door. He knows he hasn't been followed, but he doesn't move, he listens intently to the strange sounds for any warning. Slowly, he convinces himself that it is safe. Adam scrubs his face raw in the utility sink, trying to wash off the lingering effects of his fear. His body shakes with frustration. His mother had found this room and they have made it their home. This part of the subway was abandoned years ago when they added the Alewife extension. No workers come here. That is what Millie, the elderly blind woman who lived with her boyfriend, Dion, in the electrical room on the other side of the station, has told him. She had lost her eyesight when she nearly froze to death while locked out of Harvard Station last winter. Millie senses things that the others cannot. Millie has lived in this subway for a long time.

Adam rests on the raggedy mattress that he shares with his mom. He consumes the half of the Italian sub and the rest of what he has salvaged from the diner's dumpster. The electric heater

that he has secured from the subway worksite cannot compete with the protrusion of cold from the concrete walls. Adam can never get used to it. His body and mind ache as he tries to comfort himself. Adam thinks of his Mom and cannot recognize the power that the bottle has over her. She loves it more than him. He wonders when she will be able to come back. Despair envelopes him, and he submits to its lull. He dreams about his Mom and restlessly rumbles along with the trains in his erratic sleep.

Adam awakes to the smell of coffee and leftovers. He hears the electric percolator that reminds him of his mother's heart when she holds him close. Adam smiles; remembering the apartment, the one the welfare people had put them in. It had a kitchen and his mother had sometimes cooked breakfast. He thought of the chocolate chip pancakes that she had made on his tenth birthday and how she had drawn a smiley face with the syrup. She had missed his last birthday, but had left a pack of Hostess Cupcakes on his makeshift pillow. Adam sits up quickly. It isn't his mother; it is Millie who is preparing breakfast. Adam's body sags and he drops his head onto his chest. He sucks in a deep breath, wipes the drool from the side of his chin, and moves to the makeshift table. Adam barely speaks as the stale crumbs spill from his mouth. The coffee warms him and he leans back on the broken chair. Millie doesn't look so good. She has always kept up with her appearance, despite her inability to use a mirror. Her face is drawn and pale. Millie tells Adam that she is troubled; Dion has told her that he has seen the child services people this morning on the platforms and that they are looking for him. Tears well in Adam's eyes and he looks away from Millie even though he knows that she cannot see them.

Adam believes that if he can stay hidden like his mother has told him, she will be back and they can go somewhere else. He convinces himself that it is true. She will come back, she always does. Sometimes she is gone for days, but she always comes back. Adam wants to see

her, drunk or sober he doesn't care anymore, he just wants her to come back. Millie and Dion will help him stay hidden until she returns.

A couple of days later Adam is in the abandoned electrician's room with Dion. He is a large man and his appearance is daunting. His thick woolen clothes match the color of his skin and blend in with the grimy walls. Trash bags stick out of the holes in his boots and he wears a black trash bag on his head that partially covers his matted dreadlocks. The trash bags keep him warm and dry, helping him to feel secure. He is not secure now; sweat and slobber saturate Dion as he tells a story about a jungle with tigers, soldiers and guns. Adam stares at Dion's eyes as they turn dull and then jumps when Dion's voice turns thunderous. Dion snaps his head around hastily, looking back and forth, searching for something. He cannot see what Dion is looking for. Adam crouches silently in the corner covers his ears and tries not to listen. His back hurts from pressing hard against the rough cement wall as he tries to remain unseen. Adam's eyes travel with Dion as he runs frantically around the room shouting at shadows and then, finally, bolts out the door. Adam longs to stay put, but he knows he cannot. He sucks in a deep breath, grimaces and looks for inner strength. Adam knows he must go and find Millie; she went outside earlier to talk to the vendors. She is trying to find any information about his Mom and if anyone has seen the child services people today. Adam is afraid to leave, but he does not want to stay, Dion might come back. Adam's body trembles as he recalls the look on Dion's face. Slowly he eases off the wall and stands. His legs are wobbly and he has a raw dull ache in his stomach. Leaning against the wall Adam stares towards the door. He remembers that his Mom had told him to stay hidden. He curses his Mom for not being here, damn her and her booze. Adam needs to leave this room

and make it to the platform. He looks up and then down the hallway and makes a mad dash away from the room and hopefully away from Dion. He has to find Millie.

Adam is looking for Millie and watching for Dion when he sees his Mom from the shadows of the emergency exit. She has come back and is walking down the platform making her way towards him. A huge smile takes over his face and his body begins to quiver. Goose bumps cover his arms and he shakes off a chill. He presses himself up against the door and squishes his face into the small barbwire window. Adam wants to rush out of the emergency exit and run to his Mom, but he knows he must stay out of sight. He bounces from one foot to the other in expectation. Adam notices that she isn't stumbling as she walks, and she looks good, really good. He blinks twice to confirm that she is really here. Adam steps back as his Mom opens the emergency exit door. He stands rock still, smiles, and jumps into her arms hugging her tight. He starts to cry and realizes that he is hugging her too hard because his Mom makes a funny sound. He lets go of her, because he doesn't want to hurt her and she isn't hugging him back. She is crying too. Not the happy tears that he shed, but different. Adam's face goes limp. He notices the handcuffs on her wrists and takes a step back, "Mom?" Her eyes look soft, but her face is twisted in pain. Adam's jaw goes limp as his mouth drops open. His mother says, "I'm so sorry Adam. . . I'm stupid and screwed up, I'm so sorry. I have done some bad things and I am in trouble. I can't help it, I'm sick Adam, please forgive me." Adam stares at her face. His tears make her face blurry and everything seems so wrong. "Mom," Adam cries. She turns away sobbing and repeats, "I'm sorry Adam, I'm sorry, I love you." Adam sees movement behind his Mom and notices the transit police officer and a well dressed lady approaching him. He hadn't realized that they were there. Adam lunges towards the subway tunnel hoping to vanish into the darkness, but the transit cop grabs him by the shirt and wraps him up in a bear hug. Adam looks

towards his Mom. “MOM, PLEASE.” His only reply comes from the echo of his mother’s cries against the walls of the emergency exit. “Mom,” Adam pleads. The well dressed lady says, “It will be okay Adam, we can help you and your Mom.” Adam makes one last jerk towards the tracks, but the transit cop holds him tight. Adam closes his eyes, and his body goes slack. The transit cop picks Adam up and walks out the emergency exit doors.

Adam opens his eyes and sees Millie positioned on the platform. Her face is pointed directly at him and Adam thinks he can see tears streaming down her face. Wavering with fear and distrust of the transit cop, he looks back towards the emergency exit for his Mom. She has faded into the distance. She has come back, she always comes back, Adam thought as he is carried away from the emergency exit.