

A Pit of Not Quite Despair

By Elizabeth Gill

OHIO SUBURB - SATURDAY

James sits in his car (that should not be road legal) setting up his music before starting his errands. Clouds loom overhead, threatening to release rain at any moment. Visibility is poor, especially with the shop windshield wipers that haven't been replaced in six years. They were on his list of things to buy today.

He decides to hit the shuffle button on his Spotify and is pleased as song after song seems to fit his mood perfectly. He has a general idea on where he's going and waits to turn on his Google Maps. When he does, he notices his desired location shows up without him having to type it in.

"That's odd," he mutters as he presses the start button and begins to drive again.

"In one hundred feet, turn right," the mechanical Irish lady comes through the car speakers.

"At the Dunkin'? That doesn't seem right," he tries to glance quickly at the phone.

"In eight hundred feet, turn right."

James however is in the middle lane and can't get over fast enough, missing his turn.

"In five hundred feet, turn right."

Exasperated James yells, "make up your mind! WHERE AM I TURNING?!"

"At the light, make a U-turn."

James looks up expecting to see a light but there is none there. Shaking his head, he continues driving until there is a break in the cement lane divider.

"Make a U-turn."

"Stupid maps. The sign says no U-turn," James says to no one.

"Make a U-turn."

“I hope there aren't any cameras,” he says as he quickly makes an illegal U-turn.

“In eight hundred feet, turn right.”

Jame looks down at his phones, “right? Shouldn't I be turning left?”

His head snaps up as a horn blasts at him and he swerves to avoid hitting a car, “Shit!”

“In four hundred meters, turn left,” the Irish lady demands.

“Meters? Left? What is wrong with this thing today?”

“Recalculating.”

“Left or right?” James asks his Google Maps.

“Recalculating.”

“Hurry up! I'm being honked at!”

“Recalculating.”

“Oh fuck it. I'm going straight.”

“In one mile use the right lane and turn right.”

“You better be right this time or I'm switching to Apple Maps,” James threatens.

“Turn right.”

“On the gravel road?” James looks at the dark road lined by trees.

“Yes, stop being a baby and turn when I tell you to goddmanit!” The Irish voice turns angry.

“What. The. Hell?!” James heart starts beating uncontrollably.

“In one thousand feet, your destination is on the left,” the calm voice returns.

“What is happening? This does not look like Home Depot.”

“You have reached your destination.”

“A graveyard? I'm never using Google Maps again,” he says as he notices “Every Breath You Take” by the Police is playing through his speaker and feels his hair stand up as something

moves out of the corner of his eye. His confusion multiplies as he realizes the flapping item is an orange Home Depot Apron.

silent smiles

The feeling of falling consumes me and darkness folds in, filling the space. Before it can sink its retched teeth into me, a light breaks through and illuminates a forest around me. My heart thuds in my chest as my eyes adjust to the dim light. A calm confusion washes over me as I take in the foreign place.

Massive trees dwarf me as I wander through the short, stubby grass that lines their bases. The trees stretch up and up, before reaching towards each other. They gently intertwine their long arms becoming one and creating an arch for me to pass through. They never seem to end, going as far as the eye can see.

The wind moves through them, rustling their dark leaves and letting a bright light in. The wind seems to guide me through the quiet forest, showing me the way. To where, I'm not sure. But I follow anyways, an ant faithfully following its queen.

A sweet smell travels with me and puts a smile on my face. It reminds me of a warm summer's night where the stars shine brightly and I half expect to hear grasshoppers chirping away, but despite air constantly moving the trees, no sound penetrates the dark woods.

My shadow follows closely behind as I move with the wind. Reaching out, I touch the smooth bark of a tree and glance up. Thick veins travel up the giant, twisting and turning with the wind over the years. I can feel the life in the tree as its cool bark pushes back against me and shifts away from me and my intruding hand.

"Sorry," I whisper, breaking the silence of the world around me. Withdrawing my hand, I bow my head towards the tree and continue deeper into the forest.

The only sound is from my feet as they lightly tap the ground with each step. I try to mimic the leaves dancing in the breeze as I float with the wind, my cloak faithfully swaying with me.

The light and the wind move with me as each step looks the same as the last. It's almost as if the trees have been copied and pasted next to each other; some lean in more than others or have limbs reaching out at different points, but as they sink into the ground, they intertwine further, becoming one and relying on each other for survival.

Pausing, I turn, feeling as if I'm being watched. But it's silent and oh so dark behind me. The woods are endless, but I am completely and utterly alone .

The giants seem to lean away from me as I pass, wanting to remain untouched. I walk for what feels like forever, embracing the quiet brush of grass against my ankles as I intrude on the silence. Closing my eyes and breathing deep, I realize how slow my heart has been beating, calmness winning despite being lost.

A flash of light causes my eyes to open.

Sun streams through the window as the shades flutter in the morning breeze.

I'm no longer in my silent forest.

The sound of leaves rustling hurts my ears and I close my eyes again, desperate to fall back into whatever quiet hole I had just emerged from.

Where The Stars Take Me

A warm whisper of a wind rolls over me, stirring the fog in my head and making the hair on my arms stand up. Despite my eyes being closed, I can still see the stars above me, lighting up the world.

I crane my neck to see the bright dots forming clumps that I connect into shapes of houses and cars to distract myself from the pit forming in my stomach. Staring at the never-ending bright lights, I imagine all of the stories that have been told under them and about them.

My breath catches as I watch a dot arch across the dark sky and then disappear as quickly as it came.

“Please,” I beg as it fades from sight, “make my dreams come true.”

I squeeze my eyes shut, focusing on my deepest desires.

My lips move, but no sound escapes as I can’t voice the wishes or else they won’t come true.

Another breeze flutters by, stronger this time. My body feels lighter as it moves through me and pushes the unease from my body.

I exhale, releasing a breath I didn’t know I was holding as I feel like I’m floating.

The wind subsides and I realize that the lights I see are no longer stars. Instead, they are lights of cities and homes and cars as they drive through the night. I catch a glimpse of my body lying billions of miles below me.

Yes! I did it!

Triumph flickers through me before I realize that I cannot escape the sky. I wanted to know what it felt like up here, but I didn’t think I would get stuck.

At least my stomach doesn't hurt anymore.

Accepting my fate as a light to lead weary travelers, I whisper, "goodbye," to my limp body below me and fade into the night sky.

Grannie's Super-Secret Banana Muffins

Preheat the oven to 425 degrees.

Mix dry ingredients (flour, baking soda, baking powder, salt, and cinnamon) in a bowl.

In a separate bowl mix butter, bananas, brown sugar, egg, milk, and vanilla.

Combine.

Bake for 5 minutes then reduce temperature until done.

“How much flour? Why aren’t there measurements?” You murmur to yourself as you flip the worn notecard over, hoping that numbers will magically appear on the other side.

Smudges around the corners show the wear of the recipe. You desperately don’t want to mess it up. While Grannie might not be eating the muffins, everyone else will be and you can’t bear to disappoint them.

You get all the ingredients out, bouncing up and down, enjoying the music coming through your headphones.

You hope no one can see your terrible dance moves when you start measuring flour into a large bowl, hoping it’s the correct amount.

You mix the dry ingredients together and set the bowl aside.

Now you are going to panic that you don’t have butter. (But you do)

And then your stomach will sink as you realize you actually don’t have eggs. You will google what you can substitute.

The internet says you can use baking soda and oil.

You measure them out and pour them into a bowl.

The fizzing and popping of the mixture makes you uneasy. You should keep googling.

You read you can use yogurt which seems safer.

You will scoop out vanilla yogurt and mix it into the dry ingredients.

Alarms go off in your head. *Do not add vanilla extract*

Nearly there champ!

Mix not too much but not too little. It must be just right, or the muffins will be ruined along with your relationship with your entire family.

Contemplate your existence while you shove a handful of stale semi-sweet chocolate chips into your mouth.

Stir in an appropriate amount of stale chocolate chips.

Your roommate will come out and ask what you are doing.

“Do you want to taste it?” You will ask her, holding out the spatula with batter on it.

She will swipe her finger through the mixture before making a face at the taste.

“What’s in this?” She will say as her skin starts to itch.

You will panic, suddenly realizing you poisoned her with yogurt that she’s allergic to.

After averting the crisis with an epi-pen, you continue baking.

You don’t have muffin papers so grease the tin with butter and flour while you bob your head to the beat.

You make a mess of the counter and the muffin tray as you desperately try to pour the batter into each spot.

You bake the muffins for 5 minutes at 425 degrees before reducing the temperature to be less aggressively hot per grannie’s instructions. Continue to bake until you can smell the banana as you walk into the room. Don’t wait too long to take them out or you will have muffins drier than the Sahara and Grannie will be rolling over in her grave.

Clean the mountain of measuring cups you used and scrub the kitchen counters so you can sleep peacefully tonight. Then, vacuum up the splatter of flour on the floor so you can walk without fear.

Can you smell the banana yet?

Don't be hasty now! Let them have another minute while you eat more chocolate.

When they seem about done, take them out of the oven. Remember to turn the oven off after you take them out.

Appreciate their perfect golden tops and squishy interior.

You may now take a deep breath and conduct a taste test to ensure your family won't disown you.

They might.