

Away From the Night
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“Please!” I screamed and turned off the power to the phone. The voice on the other end snapped off with a sharp click.

For a moment I stand there, feeling my heart slow as my breathing regulates. My face is still wet where the receiver had been pressed against my cheek. It lies thick like a layer of mucus and I rub at it with the back of my free hand. Despite my efforts, I only succeed in smearing it around, leaving my face feeling greasy and unwashed. The beeps continue their steady downhill struggle.

“David...?” Comes a low voice from the living room. The owner of that voice is twenty-seven and cute despite the lack of hair and baggy skin.

I don't want to go back in so I lean against the bathroom sink and stare into the white porcelain speckled with encrusted dust and bits of hair from far too infrequent shavings. I rub my finger around in the bowl and scrape away at some neon blue gunk. It comes away with a little prodding and I drop it into the drain where it falls deep and fast into the waiting blackness. Logic tells me that it hits the trap, but for some reason I feel better if I believe otherwise.

She is moving in the living room and I know I have to go soon; for some reason my hand just won't let go of the sink.

“David...?” My hands loosen at the slur entering her voice.

“Coming...”

I glance in the mirror on the way out. It's not me.

The living room is small and cute, just beyond the kitchen. As I enter it, the deep rumbling of a passing train rattles the windowpane and sends a small vibration through my legs. There is a groan from the hospital bed that passes when the train bullets by

through the night. Soon all is silent again except the sound of shallow breath and the ever-slowng roll of beeps and chimes in the stuffy, hospital-esque atmosphere. Eyes lowered, I make my way to the bed where she is reclining. The wheels are unlocked, as she had asked.

I sit at the end of the couch nearest the bed and try not to think of how much it looks like a gurney. Like she asked me to, I keep my eyes on the floor, where scattered bits of feather and unpaid bills lie. The steady tracks from door to bathroom to bed are prevalent.

“Goodbye David.” Her hand falls to the side and dangles like a broken skeleton.

“I hate it when you call me David...” The laugh is expected, it always was.

“I love you...”

The rock is beginning to float in my throat, but I pull out the response steadily and with only a little wavering, “I love you too, Denise.”

I kiss that hand. The skin is loose like draped cloth. With purpose I make my to the door. My hand grips the cold faux-bronze and I stand there for a moment. The door itself needs a good cleaning. Its white finish is marked by greasy fingertip marks around the handle from emergency calls from the hospital.

I open the door and step into the empty hallway, pulling the door shut behind me. From somewhere near the steps a child is wailing.

My hand peels away from the handle as I step toward the stairs. Behind me, a steady, piercing tone grips the night. From the street, too far away, I hear the grotesque cacophony of an ambulance.

“Goodbye.”