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Absconding Machination

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Absconding Machination

Author Bio

Vera Ekhatov '19 is an English major. She says, "How would I describe my life? By breaking it up into tiny pieces. A few of these pieces are included in this magazine (thank you to the editors/staff). I'd like to thank the following amazing professors: Professor Mulligan (for helping me find my voice), Professor Melton (for teaching me the importance of a voice), Professor Kempf (for helping me overcome my hatred of poetry), Professor Portmess (for opening my eyes to the wonderful complexity of language), and Professor Williams (for showing me how to capture the world through a camera lens)."

Absconding Machination

Revelation:

The cemetery is empty and still. All of his focus is on gripping a cup full of tea that has long gone cold with fingers that have long gone numb. Trudging ahead through the fog, he keeps his eyes cast forward (with all the devotion of you, Orpheus). The cold air causes his eyes to water. When he reaches the grave site, he kneels into the fog and sets down the teacup. Reaching into his breast pocket he pulls out matches and a cigarette. He places the cigarette so that it balances across the rim of the teacup. Then, he gets to work on the matches. It takes him a few tries to successfully light one. When he does, he holds it up to the butt of the cigarette. He watches the cigarette burn down until it falls into the tea, then waits.

Transfiguration:

Under the hue of the moonlight and streetlamps, the street glistens with the sky's tears. She feels the pair of eyes on her like a hand hovering close to the skin. Her eyes follow her intuition to a man leaning on a lamppost. He's swift in looking away. She stares at him willing him to return her gaze but he does not. She shoves her hands in her coat pockets and grips her case of cigarettes as she walks over.

"Can I bum one off you?" she asks.

"Excuse me?" he says, slightly taken aback at the audacity of the stranger.

She lifts her nose and leans in.

"You smell of smoke," she says. She touches two gloved fingers to her lips twice.

He brings his head in toward his chest.

"I don't," he says.

Silence.

"Smell or smoke?" she asks.

"Both," he says looking around over her shoulder. He pushes his body off the streetlight, ready to leave. She stops him with a palm to his chest. He raises both eyebrows and widens his eyes.

"You do smell and you ought to smoke." She smooths his tie and pats his chest as she looks over his shoulder. Then, she walks away—transfigured by the milky cast of the moon's light. He reaches into his chest pocket and pulls out a silver case, it's engraved with a name and phone number. He opens it to find several cigarettes neatly laid out. He can't help but smile.

She finds the ring in the pocket of his pants. It's a minimalistic gold ring, just as she would want. But does she want? She takes the ring out of the black box and slips it on her finger. The fit is slightly loose. She turns the ring with her thumb, watching as the light dances off the gold. His footsteps echo from down the hall. She pulls off the ring, placing it as she found it, then shoves the black box back into his pocket. She sits and stares down at her hands. Her ring finger feels cold and naked.

“You seem antsy,” he says walking over and grabbing the silver case of cigarettes from her dresser.

She presses her lips tightly together. “What if I don’t want a cigarette?” she says.

He exhales, she’s baiting him. “You don’t have to have one.” He places the case back on the dresser.

“You expected me to want one,” she says.

She can see the gears turning behind his eyes. When he resolves to say nothing she continues, “Maybe I didn’t want a cigarette.”

“Maybe.”

“Now, I feel inclined to have one.”

He grabs the case again.

“So did you want one?” he asks.

“No. I’m inclined to have one now.”

“Because I offered?”

“Because you expected it.”

“Well, if you don’t want one then I don’t expect you to have one.”

“It’s too late. The damage is done.”

“Damage?”

“Yes.” She snatches the pack from his hands and lights herself a cigarette. “How am I ever going to quit if no one expects me to?”

“I didn’t know you intended to quit.”

“You didn’t expect it.”

“Should I expect it in the future?”

She inhales the cigarette deeply and closes her eyes.

“I’m tired,” she says.

“You want to go back to bed?”

“Stop that,” she snaps, throwing the cigarette down.

“Stop what?” He presses his foot to the cigarette.

“Assuming.”

He says nothing.

“I never said I was sleepy. I said I was tired.”

“People sleep when they’re tired.”

“No, you expect people to sleep when they’re tired.”

“Because they do.”

“Because that’s what’s expected.” She stresses each word.

“You don’t always have to do what’s expected.”

“I shouldn’t ever have to.”

“Then don’t.”

He picks up the snuffed cigarette from the carpet and leaves their bedroom.

Reader,

Up until now, there have been just 2 characters in this recount. I have shied away from using their names for privacy’s sake. Yes, I could use fake names but then a piece of each character’s essence would be fake as well. Additionally, if I were to choose fake names, they would be names I felt were fitting for the personalities of the characters. I refuse to do this for two reasons: 1. It would be inorganic—no parent knows a child fully before picking a name for them. 2. As narrator, I have an

obligation to be neutral. I cannot let my opinions color the essence of the characters.

Reader, I will say this, if you feel that there absolutely must be names for the characters, I give you permission to create your own, but only under one condition— I urge you to choose the names now before you read of these characters any further. This way, they will grow into or away from the names you've given them.

Sincerely,

Neutral Narrator

Gethsemane:

In the dark stillness of the bedroom, she stares up transfixed by the smoke detector's blinking light. The alarm clock faintly illuminates the room. She reaches into her nightstand and pulls out a switchblade. Rolling onto her side, she brings the blade to his neck and lets it rest at a throbbing vein. She doesn't apply too much pressure. It's not about power; it's about control. A pair of desperate eyes catch her own, startling her. She tears away from her reflection in the blade and rolls over onto her back. He hasn't so much as stirred.

She walks up the long driveway to the door of her childhood home. She taps repeatedly on the doorbell. Her mother, dressed in purple silk night robes, opens the door—she holds a full glass of wine in her hand.

"The universe's irony. I expected a Jehovah's witness yet here you are—the exact opposite," her mother sways, then gains balance against the doorframe, "or have you changed your devilish ways?" her mother asks sizing her up with a finger.

She pushes past her mother into the large foyer. No family photos. Just several paintings of different crusades and revolutions that bring color to the white walls. She walks into the kitchen and takes a seat at the volakas counter. "I need your help," she says, eyeing a perfectly arranged bowl of untouched fruit centered on the countertop.

Her mother joins her at the counter, her blinks are heavy. "I can't help you."

"I'm in too deep," she says, pulling out a cigarette and lighting it.

"No. Not in here," her mother gulps down the wine until only some remains, "extinguish it," her mother says holding out the glass.

She doesn't move.

"Now," her mother's voice deepens.

She flicks the cigarette into the extended glass

"Why are you here?" her mother asks, tentatively, as she opens the cabinet and pulls out a clean glass.

"He wants to marry me," she says.

Her mother stares at her with narrowed eyes. "Marry him, then,"

"He doesn't know," she says, biting down on her bottom lip.

"That you've been lying to him?"

"I haven't been lying," she says, swishing the cigarette tainted wine.

"Withholding the truth, is a lie," her mother pops the cork off a wine bottle, fills the new glass, then sits.

"I'm not fit for this," she lets her face fall into her palms.

"No one is," her mother says, crossing her legs and leaning back.

"What if I quit?"

Her mother stops mid-sip. "It is not a 9 to 5."

She pulls out a cigarette and makes as if to light it before remembering where she is. "I considered killing him," she says, pensively rolling the cigarette between her fingers.

Her mother leans in with a pair of gleaming eyes, a smirk on her lips. "He wouldn't be your first nor your last."

"So it's all a joke then?" she asks, standing. "I shouldn't have come."

Her mother smiles, leaning back again. "Oh please, I mistook your melodrama for comedy," her mother takes a long sip peering over the rim of the glass. When she still does not sit, her mother rolls her eyes and tacks on, "I apologize."

She places both palms on the countertop and locks eyes with her mother. "Mom, I *need* your help,"

Her mother sets the wine glass to the side, sobered, and cocks an eyebrow. "I'm listening."

Golgotha:

She sits with her father at a small circular table in her renaissance styled loft. The white loft is sparsely decorated and lit primarily by natural lighting which spills in through windows that stretch up to the ceiling.

She sets her cup down and rests her chin in her palm. "Everything tastes bland," she says.

"That's because you smoke," her father says as he adds a third teabag to her cup.

"I smoke *because* everything's bland," she says.

Her father says nothing. She crosses her arms and stares out of the window—at nothing in particular. After a moment, she reaches for the cup and takes another sip, then she sets the cup down as if it could shatter at any moment. He taps the handle of his spoon with his index finger and raises an eyebrow.

"Still bland," she says, shifting slightly in her chair.

He stops tapping and shrugs.

"Perhaps, it's not the tea," he says.

Her eyes flicker for a brief second and then go dull again. She lets out a small sigh and cocks her head, pensive.

"Perhaps, it isn't the tea," she says.

She brings a gloved hand to her mouth and removes the glove with her teeth. Reaching into her clutch she pulls out a silver case, taps out a thin cigarette and places it between her lips. Tilting her head slightly upwards, she leans forward. He lights her cigarette. She settles back into her chair and takes a long drag. He watches as the butt of her cigarette glows orange. She lets her eyes close slightly and exhales a cloud of smoke directly in front of her.

"Perhaps, it isn't the tea at all," she says, this time to herself. She crosses her legs and extinguishes the cigarette in her tea.

The front door bursts open. She doesn't jump. The intruders come in dressed in black and wearing masks. Her father reaches for the pistol he keeps at his waist only to remember that he's left it in his car. He glances up at his daughter alarmed watching as a gloved hand falls over her mouth. She closes

her eyes and smiles underneath the hand feeling as a needle sinks into her neck. “Cleaner this way,” says a masked man snidely, as he nods toward the needle.

The last image she sees as speckles fall across her vision is her father taking the butt of a gun to the head. The world goes black.

Her mother and father walk out of the morgue.

“No mother should ever have to bury their child,” her mother says, eyes watery and bloodshot. She pulls a flask from her purse and begins to untwist it. “And like this,” she shakes her head, “no obituary, no consolation.”

He eyes the flask with a curled lip. “I’d hardly call you a mother,” he says.

She narrows her eyes and turns her head with the utmost care, “As if you can be called a father. She was with you when this happened. Where was your security?”

“She didn’t want any,” he says looking down at his black leather shoes.

“And you listened? Yet, you wonder why I have dependencies. It’s to deal with you and your line of work,” she says pointing her flask.

He snaps his head up, “You never complained about the benefits.”

“I never knew where the money came from,” she says indulging in the contents of her flask. “Business is what you called it. You never specified your top-selling product.”

“Don’t pretend it would have mattered,” he grumbles.

“Rationalize all you want, but remember, you brought her into it and now you have to live with this,” she tucks the flask back into her bag. “I can only hope it ruins you,” she cocks her head, “or did they give you too much credit by leaving you alive?” She walks down the street and hails a taxi.

Once inside, she removes a pair of ill-fitting drugstore contacts, blinking away the irritation.

“Drive around to the back of that building,” she says, pointing.

Resurrection:

The mother enters through the back entrance of the morgue into a narrow hallway with flickering lights. She meets the morgue attendant at the end of the dimly lit hall.

“I owe you big time,” she says.

“That is, if I did not just sign my own death certificate,” the attendant says keying into the holding room.

“Don’t worry, her father suspects nothing,” the mother says, waving an arm dismissively.

The attendant opens one of the chambers. The mother steps closer and takes in the sight of her daughter’s lifeless body. “She looks dead,” she says.

The attendant draws a needle from his coat pocket, “The wonder of medicine,” he says flicking the needle twice. “Nothing to fear, she’s only ‘sleeping,’” he says, as he inserts the needle into her daughter’s vein. He looks down at the body, waiting with a pair of beady eyes.

“How long until she awakes,” the mother asks, stepping between the attendant and her daughter.

The attendant steps backward. “It shouldn’t be too long,” he says, pushing

up his glasses.

“Let’s hope so,” her mother says with a steely gaze. “Or it’ll be me you’ll have to worry about.”

Reconciliation:

Mother and daughter stand in the plane hangar.

Her mother holds out a bag filled with bands of cash and 2 sets of new identities. “Now, you’ll come back here with your friend and my guy will take you where you need to go. Understand?”

“Yes, thank you,” she says reaching for the bag.

Her mother moves it slightly out of reach, “There’s no coming back,” her mother says, looking at her sternly.

“I know,” she says nodding.

Her mother hands her the bag and then studies her closely. “Are you going to initiate this hug or do I have to?”

She smiles and hugs her mother for what she knows is the last time. Her mother pulls away and holds her daughter, a hand on each shoulder.

“You’re not gonna cry are you?” she asks.

Her mother scoffs, “Don’t flatter yourself.”

Her daughter mulls picking at the bag’s straps and then says, “Mom, I gotta ask—why’d you do it?”

Her mother stares into her eyes, chewing on the question. “When you asked for my help, I saw something in your eyes I haven’t seen since you were a child.”

“Need?”

“Hope.”

“What if Dad finds out?”

“Why is everyone so afraid of your father,” her mother says, exasperated.

“Well he is—”

“Yea, well don’t forget who *I* am,” her mother says smiling. “You don’t get through hell without making a few friends—speaking of which, yours is waiting for you,” her mother says, tapping her wristwatch and nudging her daughter toward the waiting car.

She stands behind a tree in the cemetery and watches him over her sunglasses. The cigarette falls into the cup—her cue. Coming up behind him, she places her gloved hand on his shoulder and squeezes.

“We should leave this too,” she says, handing him her case of cigarettes.

“I’m not going to make any assumptions but—”

“Yes, I’m quitting,” she says.

He smiles, his eyes fall on the bag she holds. “Our new lives?”

“The jet’s ready and waiting.”

“So you’re really free?” he says rising to his feet and brushing off his knees.

“I am,” she says.

“What’s next?” he asks taking the bag from her hand.

“Something unexpected. In fact, I was thinking we could make a pit stop in Vegas,” she says peering over her sunglasses into his eyes.

He removes her sunglasses and wears them, then gazes up into the sky. “I

fully expect us to only gamble.” He takes her left hand and they begin walking toward the vehicle.

“I fully intend that we won’t,” she replies.

They reach the waiting vehicle and he opens the door for her, watching as she enters.

“Fair enough, there are other things to do in Vegas,” he says one hand in pocket, restraining a smile as he enters in after her.