

2012 MCC Creative Writing Contest

Fiction Category

First Place: “*Glad Sacrifice*,” by Rachel Gilbert

“You can let go,” they say.

What bullshit. This is the gutter of my life and people come in and say stupid crap like “you can go home now”, “go be with God”, “we’re going to be okay”. They might be okay, but fuck, I’m the one stuck—wherever I am. While they’re talking and weeping and reassuring each other, do they stop even once to think about how the hell I feel listening to their shit? And it’s all shit.

People I haven’t spoken to since grade school come to visit, family I hardly know any more, who hardly know me—the third cousin on my dad’s side. They come in, sit at my side, hold my hand, and share memories. How fucked up is that?

A few times I think they might break out in a round of Kumbaya. And if I could, I might throw up because they’re so damn fake. A bunch of fake asses, who wouldn’t know real compassion, real love, real life it is hit them between the eyes.

The next round of visitors talk all techy about brainwaves and responsiveness to certain drugs, which names I can’t pronounce. Mom is there too. She’s crying—always crying.

Drugs. I could use some weed about now. Used to be when I’d think about pot, I could practically taste it. I don’t taste anything anymore. Who knew how terrible nothing would taste? *Shit. What’s happening to me?*

“Morgan’s coming to see you after school.” I hear mom whisper. My forehead tingles, I think she’s touching my hair; she used to do that to comfort me. But I don’t need comfort because right now I’m pissed. Pissed that no one realizes I can hear and I’m tired of the bullshit. I want to get up, go home, eat a real meal—God, I think I’m starving—take a shower, get dressed, go to a party, maybe break a few rules, go home and do it all over again.

I’m not sure how long these thoughts repeat, but they do and before I know it I hear Morgan skipping across the room. He’s counting by tens and then tells me how his teacher says he’ll go on to second grade. “Are you proud of me?” he asks.

I know he’s close because he sounds like he’s yelling in my ear. And for the first time in I don’t know how long, I want to laugh and tell him I’m not deaf. But I can’t talk, so a helluva-lot-of-good that does me.

His skipping stops. “Hey Jake.”

I’m here.

“I talked to God about a redo for you.”

What?

“Mom told Grandma Rospberg you got in a car and hurt someone bad. And you’re hurt too.” Morgan’s voice grows quieter. “I believe her. You look scratchy and ugly.”

“Morgan,” Mom’s voice rises. “Keep away from that tube.”

Morgan huffs. “Will Jake go home after his scratches get better?”

“There’s more than just scratches kiddo,” she says.

“When does he come home then?”

Her voice cracks. “I don’t know baby.”

I hear him skipping again.

“I’ll stay here until he feels good,” he says. “Even if it’s forever.”

No! I want to scream at him to leave now. I don’t want him at my bedside day-after-day. I want him to live, because there’s so much to live for. Shit, if only I’d known that myself. And then it comes to me, if I live—like this—his life ends.

Damn. Who would have thought I’d care. I never cared about anything much more than me. But Morgan. He’s so good.

I listen as Mom talks him into going down to the cafeteria for some dinner.

“Wait,” he says. I hear him approach. “I’ll be right back.”

“Come on Morgan.”

His voice lowers. “I’m gonna have Mom pray for a redo too. God will listen to her, she’s older.” A sensation sweeps my body and I know he’s hugging me.

“Bye Jake.”

Later little man. My chest feels as though it’s about to cave. I want to call out to Morgan. Tell him I love him. That I’m sorry I didn’t make better choices—be a better influence. But there’s just one thing I can do for him now.

The door shuts. Noise fades. In the distance a monitor beeps, slower, slower. For the first time in a long time I do the right thing. I put someone else before me, and...

JUDGE’S COMMENTS

In “Glad Sacrifice,” the narrator lies in a hospital bed following a car accident. Unable to speak but fully able to comprehend what others are saying, he makes a decision that will free his brother from having to care for him. In this voice-driven story, the writer places the reader deeply inside the narrator’s consciousness so that we feel the same distance he feels from his family and friends. At the end, we simultaneously dread and applaud his final choice.

Elissa Cahn was the contest judge. She is an MFA Fiction student at Western Michigan University, where she teaches composition and serves as the nonfiction editor for Third Coast. Her work has appeared in: NANO Fiction, Midwestern Gothic, Harpur Palate, and Quarterly West. She is currently at work on a story collection.