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Broken Face and Cinnamon Spice

I open my eyes to the alarm clock's boxy green numbers—8:04. Two more hours to sleep. But instead of curling up in my nest of blankets and pillows, I lie on my back and think about everything I have to do today: study for my Spanish final ~~exam~~, call the landlady about the broken garbage disposal, and buy a present for my roommate's 21st birthday. *How long will it take me to study? What kind of present should I buy—a CD, a bottle of wine, maybe that T-shirt from the GAP?*

I turn to the neon time—8:26. An hour and thirty-four minutes to sleep. *Stop worrying, Brittney, and go to sleep.* But I can't. I worry about what is going to be on my exam. I worry that the landlady won't answer my call and that she won't ever call me back. She's absent-minded like that. I worry about finding the perfect present. I heard about a shop downtown that sells hand-made soaps and lotions; maybe she would like some lavender body lotion.

BZZZZZ, my cell phone vibrates against my nightstand's glass top. Its screen illuminates *Dad* as the caller. *BZZZZZ*, it shakes toward the edge, and I shiver; Dad hasn't called in a few weeks. *Should I answer it?* If I answer, I'll waste more of my sleeping time, but since I can't sleep, I should just answer it. And if I don't answer, I'll have to endure listening to a five minute long voicemail message and call him back just to hear him repeat the message. I catch the phone as it buzzes off the table and flip it to my ear.

“Hey Dad.”

“Hi Britt. I thought I would tell you what’s been goin’ on with me. As you probably figured out, I threw away five months of sobriety and started drinking again....”

He’s right. I had figured it out. Five months was a long time for him, so I knew he wouldn’t be able to last much longer. His voice sounds dry and rough as if he had breathed in the Arizona desert, the scorching sand and cactus scraping through his veins, throat, and brain.

“...But after a while, I decided to stop drinking, just like that, and stopped. I went through severe withdrawals and suffered a pretty major seizure. I fell on my face and bit into my lip and tongue. The good news is that I didn’t bite all the way through either of them. I just broke my nose in two places and have some bruising. I’m lucky ~~that~~ it wasn’t worse...I could be dead. Maybe this is what it took for me to get on the right track. But don’t worry about me. I just wanted you to know what happened.”

“God, Dad! I’m glad you’re ok.”

“Thanks. I wish love for your children could keep you sober, but unfortunately that’s not the case for me. I love you so much, and I’m so proud of you. But, I won’t take up anymore of your minutes. I’ll call you again soon.”

“Ok. Bye.”

I slam the phone closed and imagine a dark apartment, bare except for beer cans and vodka bottles covering the counters, tables, and floors. Dad is lying facedown on the kitchen’s white tile floor, blood oozing from his head and tracing the cracks around each tile. Then, he lifts his smashed face, a mask of congealed blood disguising him. He gets up, stumbles, and zigzags toward the door. I imagine a business woman walking into the lobby as my dad appears from behind elevator doors: his eyes bloodshot, his hair curling

in all directions, his clothes ~~dirty and~~ smelly from wearing them for the past two weeks, and his face broken and bloody. I imagine the woman in a black suit and black high heels screaming and calling for help and trying to ask my dad what happened.

I wonder if anyone else has talked to Dad yet. Mom will think that he deserves it, and say, “if he wants to kill himself, let him kill himself.” My brother won’t talk about it, and my sister will feel sorry for him and might even cry.

9:33—twenty-seven more minutes to sleep. *I should get up and start my day; I have so much to do.* I walk into the kitchen to make some coffee and a sun-dried tomato bagel, but stop, gagging from the stench of rotten food—the garbage disposal. I light a cinnamon spice candle and put it next to the sink. The blackened wick has melted the red wax to form a deep bowl. As the flame flickers within, the whole candle blinks. I love its fragrance; it reminds me of Christmas.