

Tripping Over Words

Beep! Beep! Beep! Beep! Beep! I smack the snooze. Three milliseconds later. Beep! Beep! Beep! Dang. I look at the red glare of the clock through the pitch black. Three, zero, zero. I tell myself 'I'll be fine. Four hours of sleep was enough.'

I jump out of the car at the terminal. I get my tickets and stand in line. For three hours. I try to sleep on the plane but this little boy next to me keeps asking me about "Finding Nemo". I ask him how old he is. He holds up four fingers and says he's three.

I get off the plane and walk through all the guys with cheap bouquets for their prize girls. In the corner behind all the successful looking boyfriends stands a short, old man holding a dozen fresh, red roses.

The automatic doors slide open with a "ding". The intercom tells me to have a good day in Spanish and then French. I smell it snowing before I see it. I haven't seen real Michigan snow for six years, and I get that feeling you get in your stomach when someone surprises you.

I sit at the bus stop for approximately an hour and a half. The bus drops me off outside of the Aging in Place nursing home. As the doors open for me, the smell of dying creeps out to welcome me. A skinny, miserable looking woman in a throw up colored outfit leads me down a door to the left. I follow that lady in her most boring shade of yellow as we walk down and down and down halls the color of grass that hasn't been watered in forever. She stops and holds out her hand like those girls on "The Price is Right" to show me a brand new car. I trudge into the room.

I avoid looking at him. He drifts in and out of sleep and stares at me for a hot minute. He calls me Suzy. That's what he always called my mom. I feel so awkward and depressed. I don't correct him. I don't want to be here. I want to leave. I try to say something but I've got nothing. No words of encouragement, no funny comment. I've never felt so secluded in my seventeen years of existence. Doctor so and so rambles on and on about how the old man's been and what's

been happening lately. I'm stuck in a triangle. I stare at the doctor lady, look over at him and glance down at my feet, like they suddenly became so freaking interesting. When whatsherface finally leaves, all I can remember is "He's got a week or two to live" and I panic. How could I allow myself to be stuck in this position all alone? As soon as he falls asleep again, I make a mad dash for the door. I need to breathe. This place is humiliating. You even have to ask permission from the vicious black lady at the front desk to open the door. As if these decaying old people can sprint out the door to freedom.

I'm digging through my bag. How could I forget? The retard threw out my smokes at the airport because they were a fire hazard. It starts to rain and I stand cigaretteless under the little canopy. Helaina and I promised each other no more smoking anyway. I turn around and go back inside.

A little old man in a wheel chair rolls up to me and asks me if I'm his wife. I tell him that I'm not. He proceeds to ask me if I know what time she's coming. I start to answer him but a caffeinated orderly teleports miraculously to my side before I can think of something good.

"Your wife is on her way Mr. Marks. She'll be here in an hour."

I feel like knocking her face in because by the look on it, I can tell that's bull. I read her thoughts as she stares at me, begging me with her eyes to play along. Mr. Mark's wife's long gone just like his memory. I walk back towards the room.

Halfway there, I hear a creaking behind me. I don't even turn around. "Mr. Marks, I'm sure your wife will be here soon." He rolls up beside me and the look on his face is contagious. I feel ashamed because I know no words that can take away his pain, his confusion, and his agony.

I wander among the rooms and end up in a dreary cafeteria. A sad little piano catches my eye. I slowly walk to it and slide my hand across the cover. I sit down and open its lid. It's so dusty. I can tell it hasn't been played since before I was born. I hit a few notes and it's way out of tune. A couple of the workers preparing dinner look out at me curiously.

I haven't played in about a year so I can't remember anything off the top of my head . I stand up, and luckily, there's a couple books in the bench when I lift up the board. All the pages are torn, falling apart, and some are missing. I start to play Yankee Doodle and a bunch of other patriotic songs because it's all they have. I play through America the Beautiful, My Country 'Tis of Thee and the Star Spangled Banner.

When I stop playing, I don't hear anymore dishes clanking, nurses chatting, or ancient gossip. Where did they all go? Slightly confused, I turn on the bench. Before me sits about twenty aged wheel chair riders, fifteen walker users, a couple of Nam vets on a couch, almost thirty antiques sitting in plastic chairs and nearly the entire nursing staff and kitchen crew. A Hispanic looking cook near the back whistles. Half of the room claps. The other half stares as if I am just another channel on TV and it's a commercial. Somewhat embarrassed, I stand up, replace the piano's lid and begin to walk out.

Before I have time for my face to redden, I hear a quiet alarm begin to sound from the hall. I turn to the right towards his room and I see a doctor meandering to it. I quicken my pace and as I push back the door, I can't believe my eyes.