

Seventh Floor Ward

by Gary V. Powell

The blonde girl leaks crazy from the corners of her eyes. It curls above her head, then paints the walls with a greasy, psychedelic swirl. Thirty times she's tried to kill herself.

The old man watching TV has crazy in his drawers. Once a month, he flaps his weenie at concert-going crowds. He thrives on the thrill of the men, buttoned-down and zippered-up, rushing to subdue him, the smiles of the women, tight-skirted and high-heeled, tittering like birds on a wire.

The Asian girl, who has just arrived, her father looking like he's been goosed by a garden hose, is crazy with her feet and fists. She's also crazy with boys, drugs, alcohol, and razor blades.

The orderlies bind her in a straight jacket and shoot her full of sedatives. Moving like robots, they never smile or sneer. Their crazy is in the daily vomit drudgery, the old "feces under the bed" trick, the mop and the fucking bucket swish-swash.

The admitting nurse takes the daughter's information from the father. She describes the routine that must be followed, a routine the girl will inevitably resist like she's resisted every other opportunity for conformity in her short life. The nurse's calm belies a collage of crazy behind the mask—the marriage to a man she doesn't love, the nine-inch rotating and thrusting vibrator hidden in her panty drawer, the chocolate candy wrappers stuffed beneath her pillow.

When the father attempts to leave, a middle-aged woman in a stained pink nightgown cuts him off and asks for a cigarette. Hers is the kind of crazy that can't be masked. She's worn it on her sleeves since tenth grade. Tonight, it presents in her broken nose, the creases around her blowjob mouth, the meth-head's smile of rotting yellow teeth.

The father cannot help this woman. He doesn't smoke, has a terrible sinus infection, and wants only to return to his wife and son and comfortable home in the suburbs, the home where two days

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earlier his son found his adopted Asian daughter naked in her bed and over-dosed on prescription pills.

The father's crazy is his love for this daughter he's trying to survive until she's well enough to survive herself, if that's even possible.

