

Mayweather

by Bud Smith

I grew up in campground in New Jersey, all dirt roads—so it felt like West Virginia or something but everybody had an accent like Sylvester Stallone. *Shout out to all my Cedar Creek Campground homies! Whoop Whoop!*

Outside the campground theres a little town by the bay, called Bayville, surrounded by pine trees—in the pines, looming over the town, there's a massive beige castle built in the 1920s by Al Capone, as a luxury resort. Well now there's nothing luxurious about it, it's a convalescent home, and a mental care facility.

That's where my grandfather died. Those places are horrible. They steal all your things while you're laying there dying. They stole my grandpa's watch.

But the place is magic too. There's escape tunnels that go beneath the cranberry bog for when Al Capone had to dodge the law, the G Men coming for him and all his bootlegged liquor. I spent my youth trying to find the entrances to those tunnels.

* * *

It's also where my mother went when she had her mental breakdown, FYI.

* * *

One of my coworker's, Charlie, his mom wound up in that place too, but just to die, at 90—but we, me and the coworker, we didn't talk about it like that. What happened, was—out of the blue, a few weeks ago, he began bringing me an orange each shift. Or sometimes it wasn't an orange, sometimes it was a different kind of citrus, a minneola, or a clementine, once it was a grapefruit.

We hadn't ever got along, all the years of working together and last summer there was a moment when he'd got into my face, finger stabbing me in the chest and he'd said, "I'll see you in the parking lot, motherfucker."

He legit wanted to fight and I can't remember what it was about now, but I didn't go out in the parking lot at 3:30pm like he wanted and fist fight him, like he said he wanted, probably partly because he was 68 and I was 32 and there's no way to win a fight against a 68 year old man; either he beats the shit out of you and there you are with a bloody nose and a loose tooth from an old man; or there you are with a fractured hand and an old man laying in the gravel, wheezing, spitting, coughing up a pained pant and you just look like an asshole.

So I let it go, and he let it go:

But now the oranges.

But now the grapefruit.

But now these minneolas so ripe with juice.

* * *

My mother wound up on the seventh floor. That is where the wire mesh is. That is where the electric buttons are buzzed and where doors only swing open in calculated order. That is where she told them she was suicidal and it was true—and later, she told us that she told them she was suicidal and it was all a game, it wasn't true. "Sometimes you just have to tell people what they want to hear to keep the peace."

* * *

Once, I delivered a pizza up there, for the people at the desk. This was years after mom got out. Was it weird for me to think of them as the Gods on Mount Olympus and that they'd reel me in with magic nets and make me lie to them to to get out? As it goes, they didn't tip me very well for the pizza. Lesson learned, don't expect much at the psych ward.

* * *

Floors 1-6 are where the elderly go to fade
Floors 7-12 are where the damaged go to twitch

* * *

Floor 13 is the roof, where the Gods go to smoke

For years, I wondered what their view from the roof was, the view
from our town is the Mayweather throwing a shadow over the pines
blocking the sun; or the Mayweather blocking the moon and making
us live in weird residential lunar shadow.

* * *

Once, I dated a girl named Shannon
Shannon had a job at the Mayweather
for a week
before I helped her lose her job.
But before that, she paged me and I came
and we went up to the 13th floor, the roof!
And do you know what we saw?
We actually could see the ocean.
Not just the bay, also, the ocean
Could pick out the ferris wheel spinning
in the distance at Seaside Heights
the fucked up fireworks
the ripple of the good water.

* * *

could see Cedar Creek campground, too
my mother lighting a campfire in our yard
things were finally good.

* * *

I was seven, I played army in the pines with my friend Abe
and we knew where to find the bunker by the cranberry bog
a concrete pit in the needles and cones

covered in 666 and Swastikas
and a wall sealed with brick that used to be a tunnel
that went from the convalescent home, beneath
the bog
Al Capone used to use the tunnel to escape
my friends and I came with his dad's carpenter's hammer
and tried to knock the wall down
but behind the wall, was another wall
and there were other bunkers and they had walls
behind walls too

* * *

Abe is my realtor now, he's trying to help me buy a condo in Jersey City. He just got me pre-approved for a mortgage, so if you're looking for a realtor, or looking to buy something real nice in the metro city area, come see me after the reading I'll get you in touch.

* * *

Abe's dad is named Charlie too, same as my old man co-worker who wanted to beat the fuck out of me. One day, I was at Abe's house in the campground and his dad all of a sudden found Jesus. Snap your fingers, there's Jesus! So Charlie decides to start volunteering his time at the Mayweather: I'm not making fun of that. I think that's beautiful and what religion should be about, going and helping the poor, the destitute—he'd go and read to the blind people there, in the convalescent home. He'd load his Volkswagen rabbit up with paperback books donated/discarded from the library and he'd go drive through the pines to see the people.

* * *

My grandpa was in the Mayweather around this time
and around this time, his watch was stolen there. He went to the second floor for hospice care for stomach cancer. We went and saw him everyday that summer. On the first day of autumn he died, and

the watch was gone from his wrist. But the day before he died, something bizarre happened. We pulled up in mom's minivan and saw Charlie's blue Volkswagen Rabbit, crashed head first into a pine tree, the car was still hissing and the doors were flung open. Charlie had come with his Volkswagen full of donated books but he'd had to make a few trips because he had multiple boxes and while he was gone with the first box, a patient had run out of the foyer of the convalescent home and hopped in the car. He slammed the pedal down, crashed into the trees and sprinted into the pines in his robe and pajamas, fuzzy slippers. They caught the man climbing into the cranberry bog, wading out, trying to flee the law like Al Capone.

* * *

And I know you've all been wondering,
so here's the deal with the minneolas:

At the oil refinery where I work, there's a guard shack that you have to pass through and the girl who sits in the guard shack is very beautiful. The men try to do whatever they can to talk to her, and somehow, some way, one of them brings her fruit every day, I don't know who it is. She doesn't ever eat the fruit, she stuffs it in her purse or she throws it away. Charlie (who's 68 and wants to kick my ass, that Charlie) saw her one day with one of these oranges, saw his chance, and mentioned his mother who is 90 and who is dying in the Mayweather and who would love an orange—he's going to see her tonight as a matter of fact. The girl in the guard shack smiled, and gave him the orange.

And now they have something to talk about everyday. And now she knows his name, says, "Hi Charlie, how are you? Are you okay today? How's mom?" And now Charlie gives me a minneola every day or a grape fruit or a tangerine, or sometimes even a handful of key limes, he says, "My mom can't eat this shit, she's dying. I bring

her cake. A dying person should eat birthday cake every night, not a bullshit orange."

I consider Charlie a friend now.

* * *

And about the watch:

I do get grandpa's watch back

delivering a pizza once

I saw an orderly in there, with it on

and Shannon helped me confront him

on his last day of work there

on her last day of work there too

I force that mopping scumbag to hand the watch over and he almost starts to cry and that feels good! Go cry! Mop the floors with your tears!

and I slip grandpa's watch back on my wrist!

and I wear it every day!

* * *holds up hand* * *

* * *watch is gone* * *

well I did, till last night

I've lost the watch

in the back of a taxi cab

but that's besides the point

everything is lost

eventually

* * *

So, here I am, peeling a grapefruit on my way through the gravel lot, the smoke of the oil refinery drifting away over my shoulder, the rind falling in the gravel, the sweet juice covering my hands and filling my sour mouth.

So here I am in my car with sticky fingers on the sticky steering

wheel. And I'm just about to drive away. Opposite direction of where I grew up, away from the campground, away from the little town by the bay, away from the Mayweather.

I may have never found the way into the secret tunnels that go beneath the cranberry bog, but I know they're there and sometime if you're looking for something to do, I'll take you to the town where I was born and maybe we'll be able to break in together, if we give it all we've got.

