

Panic Pure

by Franklin Goodish

Mom screams at me to take her. At first I think she means the bathroom or maybe the grocery store. The drugs transform me into God. She wants me to take her home, or above, or below, anywhere else.

I hold her and she slaps at my chest. I pull away and sit down, tapping on the computer. Obvious choice, yes, but hearing Vic Chestnutt sing about a mother being cancer sick and begging Lord Jesus that she was ready. Like Vic, death is decimating those dear to me.

Vic lived in hot pain his whole life because of a car accident. He had been drinking before the accident. So had the other driver. Despite limited use of his hands, he learned to play the guitar even better than when he was whole. He became more than he had been. He said, "It was only after I broke my neck and even like maybe a year later that I really started realizing that I had something to say."

My mom sleeps. I watch. I won't get up. I won't go outside for a walk or go see my grandmother three floors down, whose daughter's demise is likely hers too. I won't use the bathroom, glance at the mirror. At 43, whatever I was going to do I've done. Unlike Vic, my scars are tree rings; if uncountable, it is because of their multitudes, their depth, their ability to hide at times.

Hours later, Vic sings about holding a sparkler at a 4th of July parade as a kid, shaking the sparkler high up to the dark sky with "an urgency I'll never be able to repeat." The idea of shaking anything at the sky now feels asinine, rife with histrionics. I rub my mom's arms but don't change her. The smell comforts, assures me she is not long.

I will help Grandma tidy up, assure her that I'm happy to inherit Mom's condo even if I can't move in until 55 and owe monthly \$400 condo payments, which I need for child support and alimony. I will fly back to Virginia, knowing once Grandma goes all I have left is a son, one who I speak to three times a week, one who sees me every third weekend, one who realizes there is little I can offer.

The hospice nurse should be called. I couldn't have been the first person to ever kick her out. She can tell me what to do, what to say, how this all goes.

