

i found this.

by Johnny Dantonio

A month later and I head back to a place for Thanksgiving break. Home is where my parents live and my relatives visit. This year's solstice brings two sets of dying grandparents who can't move or hear well. I selfishly find myself some thirty hours in with the want to leave, jealous of the attention they receive from my mother and father. We haven't had time together, just the three of us, in what seems like forever.

I must have masturbated eight times in those three days.

My grandfather on my father's side is an epitome of ripeness and the most engaging of my kin. He was the kind of man who had calluses before he had pubic hair, black eyes before first kisses. He smoked rolled cigarettes when he was younger and as a teen went across to Juarez to watch bullfights and the older girls in the stands, the same bleachers he'd return to later for a seductive platform, and later as a steadying base for nervous bent knee when he would propose to my grandmother. His olive Italian skin seemed to smear into his wet hair in the older photographs that I never got to see until he showed me his war pictures at Great Grandma's funeral when I was 14. He didn't die before his mother. I found that, in his case, very sad.

I was a freshman in high school when she died, his mother. She was originally from Montonerodomo and had brought our lineage to America. My memories of her recall wrinkled hands clutching mine, or a rosary, or a tacky Christmas tin that carried the Italian cookies she used to make. If she ever read this, she'd smack me for not remembering their name in correct dialect.

That was my first funeral, maybe my first genuine cry, and it all had to do with watching my grandfather shake vigorously in a

Catholic kneel before a closed coffin, weeping and rejecting consolation: a man and his mother, and all that she deserves.

I come home to my Nashville city high-rise. It's raining out and freezing in. I had turned the heat off before leaving and thought I deserved the teeth chatter when I walked through the doors.

I sit down still wearing an old valor jacket that was my father's at some point. It's heinous and I don't like it much, but it clings to a familiar scent. Typing on a laptop that nearly burns my crossed calves as I sit in shorts, I start thinking about creating something that the typical can understand, something that will allow sorority girls to bypass the vulgarity that words apply to reality.

Life or love or whatever it is that we constantly try to define as the self-denying, struggling young people we are must be insulted by rose pedals and candlelight, and Natalie Portman in Garden State, and airport terminal sprints into waiting arms. It's more honest than split seconds; it's premeditated like cutting the fingernails you never pay attention to the minutes before your latest girlfriend comes over just in case you finger her; it's the violent rush to the bathroom the second she leaves your apartment in dedication to your hard, frequent stomach contractions that kept you from vibrating against her body in a nervous couch cuddle.

I don't get far with the writing. Putting on synth-heavy, slow pop, I raise a window to exacerbate everything. The return to this sadness due to the holiday neglect, the loneliness, and now an artistic inability, has me arguing with myself like I used to: "what the fuck do you have to be sad about?"

Emily's nostrils widen to inhale the steam from the kettle, sweat running down her sideburns to puddle in the crevices of her collar bone, tip-toe stretching with her eyes closed, her unwrapped midriff pressing against the rusted towel rack that is attached to her iron stove, waiting for a thing to warm.

