

## *Crashing*

The grey November day that the J-train flies off the tracks at the Gates Avenue Station, careening down into the Walgreens below and killing nine people is also the day Naomi's boyfriend takes a few too many sleeping pills and calmly stops breathing in the studio apartment they share but he pays for three blocks away. Naomi doesn't know about the boyfriend yet, as she is sitting in a cafe across Gates Avenue, sucking down an iced oat latte she can't afford and watching the devastation.

Her horoscope had told her that something like this might happen. At least, something about calamity had been mentioned somewhere. Maybe on a podcast? She can't remember. It's pretty, really, with the smoke and dust and flashing emergency lights. Some statement about capitalism, perhaps. She loses the thought.

#

Naomi suspects that her boyfriend might be dead because, when she enters their apartment, a dingy studio off Ralph and Monroe, he is in bed. David Choi has, or rather had,

never been in bed past noon a day in his life, and therefore only the most obvious of conclusions can be drawn.

She places a hand on a room temperature shoulder under a cotton sheet. No response.

He hasn't left a note, which is completely unlike him.

#

Search engine results for: *What to do with a dead body.*

*1) Get a legal pronouncement of death; 2) Arrange transportation of the body; 3) Notify the person's doctor or the county coroner; 4) Notify the close family and friends; 5) Handle the care of dependents and pets; 6) Call the person's employer.*

A body is a lot harder to move than Naomi had been led to believe by true crime television. Dead weight isn't a joke, it's a fact.

Only about half of David's body fits into a garbage bag — less, really. Naomi curls his bottom half into another garbage bag and attaches the two bags with duct tape. Rolling the body onto its side to tape the back she hears a light sigh emanate from the body, as though David finds her makeshift problem solving disappointing.

"Hey, David?"

Nothing.

"If you're alive, this is your last chance to tell me, ok?"

Silence.

"Ok."

His head thunks on every step down the stairs.

The trash can lid doesn't want to close, but she pushes it down with the weight of her entire body and she hears it click shut.

#

There are no bodies. Presumably, they've already been removed. There are people everywhere, pretending not to stare. Exploded beer cans and crushed pints of ice cream lay strewn beneath a layer of shattered glass, in the shadow of the train car that lays draped over the wall.

"Excuse me, miss?" a woman with a microphone comes right at her, cameraman right behind. "What do you make of today's tragedy?" Naomi stares at her. "What could the Walgreens Boots Alliance have done to protect employees from disasters such as this one?" They wait expectantly. Naomi waves into the camera.

Naomi takes her spot at the cosmetics counter. She signs into the cash register. The cosmetics wall is the only one still fully standing, but the force of the crash has knocked most of the products off the wall. She stands at her post among false eyelashes knocked from their packaging.

After five or six minutes a police officer approaches. He looks like someone's grandfather — not Naomi's because her grandfather is white and this man is black, but someone's.

"Excuse me, ma'am, what are you doing?"

"I work here."

"Ma'am, there's been an accident."

"I work 3:00-8:00 on Tuesdays."

“Ma’am, you need to go home.”

“Will I get paid for my shift?”

He stares at her.

Naomi grabs a bag of Sour Patch Watermelons on the way out. They still hang perfectly on their rack in the candy aisle.

#

She sits in the dark, on her bed, licking the crystal remains of gummy candy out of the bag. The Bachelor is on. Colton’s season. She’s seen it a few times. This is the episode where he breaks up with the finalists to pursue Cassie instead. Naomi knows how it ends.

#

She is falling asleep, finally. The sugar and screen have left her too exhausted to drift off, but she has lain in the dark running her tongue over the powdered surface of her unbrushed teeth and thinking about maybe masturbating which has finally done the trick, and the bright spots in her brain begin to dim.

Someone taps at the door.

The tapping becomes a real knock.

Ignore it. Ignore it and they’ll go away.

Naomi’s eyes stay closed.

“Hey, David? Are you there?”

Naomi sets her feet to the floor and considers for a moment putting on pants, or a bra, or anything other than the blue Walgreens polo which she is still wearing. But the knocking has resumed at an enthusiastic volume and Naomi walks to the door and swings it open.

“Hello!”

Peering in from the bright light of the hallway is Megan Choi. David’s sister.

#

She wraps Naomi in a gigantic hug. Her ponytailed head rests under Naomi’s chin.

“I’m so happy to see you! How are you? How’s everything?”

She pushes past Naomi into the apartment, dragging behind her a roller suitcase twice her size.

“Um.”

“How’s David? Where is he? Ooh, I love what you’ve done with the apartment!” Megan is the only person Naomi has ever known who says “Ooh” to express excitement, like a character in a cartoon.

“I’m not sure where David is, actually.”

“Off on an adventure somewhere?”

“Yeah.”

“You two are just so funny. I can’t believe you put up with all of that spontaneity all the time.”

“Well—”

“Hey, Naomi, can I ask a huge favor?” Megan sits cross-legged on the bed, her eyes huge. “Can I stay here with you guys, just for a couple days?”

“What?”

“I dropped out of the Tai Chi Academy in Rio, and Mom will be so, so mad. Just a little while, while I figure out what to tell her? Please?”

“I guess.”

Megan squeals with an energy that propels her off the bed and into Naomi’s neck again.

“Thank you thank you thank you! I’ll be so quiet, you won’t even know I’m here.”

Megan whips a bottle of wine out of her absurdly sized suitcase and spends the evening talking to Naomi about tai chi and Rio, two topics in which Naomi is not interested in the slightest.

Somehow, by the end of the evening, Megan has ended up curled on David’s side of the bed to sleep, rather than the floor, where she had unrolled a sleeping bag and promised to stay.

#

Naomi hates Megan, probably. Her constant chatter, her laughter at her own jokes, the incessant bustling with which she cooks and cleans, all distract Naomi from *Rock of Love* reruns. She has been told that *Flavor of Love* is better, but she likes Bret Michaels. He really appreciates women.

Megan has stopped asking about David. Where he is, when he’ll be back. She has not once spent the night in her sleeping bag, although it remains rolled out on the floor next to the bed.

Naomi hates Megan probably, but maybe not as much as she hates David. At least Megan doesn’t try to cuddle her, or tell her she’s got to do something other than watch reality television all day, or try to get her to eat something other than Skittles or Sour Patch. Megan doesn’t care at all, just cooks soup for herself and slowly unpacks her suitcase as though if she does it item by item Naomi won’t notice. Naomi notices. She isn’t stupid. But Peter Weber, Bachelor of Season 24, most definitely is, and she loves to watch him fail to manage his girlfriends.

Naomi hasn't told Megan that the rent is due next week. The entire structure of the Gates Avenue stop, ticket machines and all, has collapsed atop the remains of the Walgreens, dashing it all into rubble, and Naomi no longer goes there for candy, choosing instead a bodega three blocks from her building. No one there looks twice at the quiet white girl tucking Sour Patch Watermelons into her canvas tote bag.

Naomi might try to explain to her landlord — not a person so much as a faceless conglomerate based in Washington Heights — that she has lost her job in a freak accident and will not be able to pay the rent for the month of December by next week, Wednesday December 1st. Perhaps they will be understanding. Perhaps they won't. Naomi isn't too attached either way.

She chews a Sour Patch Watermelon. The sugar hurts her teeth. In the kitchen, Megan hums something to herself under the hiss of a sautéing onion. Naomi pulls up the Bachelorette — Hannah Brown's season, the one where the guy she picks had another girlfriend the whole time — and presses play.