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There do exist among us those golden people who seem to have been blessed by fate, and God, and genetics. Those blindingly luminous beings that are lousy with all manner of talent, and make everyone around them seem just plain lousy by comparison. I am not one of them. For me failure isn't just an option I've gone and turned it into an art form.

There was the time I was finally given the part of the fairy Godmother in our school play and I very nearly put out, Cinderella's eye with my wand. Gina Scott still hates me; no one can hold a grudge like a wounded princess. This led to my attempt to run away with the circus, which in turn led to the discovery of my clown phobia. My biggest and most rankling source of failure however, stems from my art.

All I've ever wanted was to become a realD artist. Ever since a substitute teacher/amateur realD artist attempted to quiet down our exuberant first grade class by sketching a goofy looking pink dragon on the board. He stepped back as the dragon fluttered to life and pulled itself free from the board. It flew around the classroom expelling green and purple puffs of chalky smoke from its nostrils sending most of my classmates into fits of shrieks and giggles. All these years later I remember how it hovered right in front of me and stretched out its chubby pink claws towards me like a long lost friend might. I clasped its claws eagerly, and it promptly dissolved into dust in my overzealous grasp. The teacher tried his best to console me as he helped me wash the bright pink stains off my hands.

He'd said that what had happened was normal. The better the realD artist was the more substantial their drawings were, but no matter how real it seemed it would never be really real. I didn't believe him, I'd seen myself reflected in the dragon's eyes and I was real, but I didn't argue the point.

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I resolved instead to become the greatest realD artist the world had ever known, blurring the lines of reality with every stroke of my charcoal pen and paint brush.

Thirteen years later the quality of my art has improved substantially, my people look like people, with all their individual flaws and beauty, my landscapes look real enough to step into, but they're about as lively as an average person's doodles. Occasionally the roils in one of my fairy tale pictures will point and jeer at me, and the poster sized king Kong I did last week is constantly making obscene gestures in my direction, thankfully he's already got a buyer, but other than that the things I make stay frozen, like waxy catatonics, alive but unreachable in some essential way.

I pull king Kong off the wall. He flips me off one last time as I roll him up and seal him in his container. I step out of my tiny studio apartment and walk to Joe's little shop of treasures. As I push through the door of the small shop I find, Joe sitting behind the counter surrounded by his accumulation of rare and unusual treasures. It's mostly junk, but, Joe is one of those guys who can make you believe everything is priceless. His shock of white blond hair is sticking out in every direction somehow meshing perfectly with his cheesy grin.

"Whinny, my favorite artist. You look like you could use some coffee."

"Among other things. " I tell him and shove the container with king Kong at him.

"Well, in that case let me close up here, I'll take you out to lunch and you can fill me in." I make a face at him. Joe is my best friend, my only friend if I really think about it which is why I always turn him down when he tries to ask me out. I don't date much, but when I do it usually ends in disaster. My last two boyfriends being perfect examples. The first stalked me for six months after I broke up with him. He'd leave long letters stuck to my windshield or under my welcome mat that alternated from pleading to threatening and always included one of my poor drawings cut up into little accusatory pieces. The second tried to have me arrested after I accidentally set him on fire with one of my

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paintings. I know I should have felt bad about that one, but that was one of my most successful drawings and besides his hair grew back for the most part.

"You want me to fill you in?" I ask as I pull out two stacks of letters from my oversized bag. I slap the first one down on the counter, "these are rejections from every decent realD art program in the country." I slam the other stack down like a gavel, "and these are all the bills I can't pay. Which is why I've decided to give the circus another try. Who knows maybe I'll even learn to like clowns. The odds of that happening have to be better than me ever breaking through as an artist. There, now you're all filled in." Joe's grin only widens which makes me want to smack him and kiss him at the same time.

"Come here, I want to show you something," he says walking out from behind the counter. He leads me to the back of the shop where a rusty old toilet sits proudly against the wall. Joe puts an arm around me and points at the toilet.

"That's you," he offers happily.

"Oh, well that explains everything. Thank you I feel so much better now."

"No, listen People always want to dump on it, because they don't realize the value of what it holds within itself." I give, Joe an incredulous look, "It's a dirty old toilet. I shudder to think what it holds inside." Joe shoots me another smile,

"That's because you don't know what I know. That's not a toilet."

"It's not?" I ask doubtfully.

"Nope, it's a portal."

"Most toilets are," I quip.

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"true, but this one can take you anywhere you want to go in the world, and I think it' even has the potential to move through other dimensions. The problem is it's all clogged up from all those years of misuse."

"What a shame we didn't come with plumbers."

"You don't need one. You two have me," he says confidently. "Picture it, we could travel all over. I'd sell and trade my treasures and you could dazzle people around the world with your art."

"You know what, Joe? I think that's you over there not me. And, I think you and the toilet are both full of crap." Joe throws his head back and laughs, "You'll see."

"Uh huh, well I'll just settle for my check for now."

"You know, Whinny for an artist you don't have much imagination." We walk back to the front and, Joe slides my puny check across the counter to me. I try snatching it up but he holds it down.

"Are you sure you're not hungry?" he asks hopefully.

"Are you kidding me? After your toilet revelation I've got to rush back to my studio and release my inner potential." Joe only beams at me,

"So, you're admitting that I'm your muse then>:

"Oh, absolutely," I say as I scoop up my check and roll my eyes.

"Great and you know anytime you need me to pose naked with fruit, or whatever I'm here for you." Lacking any snappy comeback I take a page from King Kong and flip, Joe off as I walk out the door.

My studio feels oppressively small as I set my keys down on the high kitchen counter that doubles as the dining table. Half formed sketches lie dejectedly in the corners like neglected pets. And,

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there back lit by the apartments single window squats the easel, Joe salvaged from the yard sale of an up and coming realD artist who was blinded by one of his disgruntled paintings. According to, Joe he has since switched to sculpting, which is much less likely to come alive but then I suppose that's the point.

The easel holds up a blank canvas that has stared me down for the past month. I've been afraid to even glance at it until now, fearing that I would be blinded not by something I created, but by the dazzling white emptiness that sums up everything I lack. Now, I don't dare look away. I approach it as one might approach a cougar; eyes forward and arms slightly extended to create the illusion of greater girth and confidence.

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From the coffee table I snatch up a color pallet and in one fluid motion drape a streak of color across the glaring whiteness. And, just like that everything shifts. I stop only when the light has become too dim to see by. The sun has recently gone down leaving the thinnest trickles of light puddled in the corners of the glass.

My spine pops as I straighten with a wince. I am puzzled and annoyed in equal measures as I scrutinize my creation. A toilet, Joe's toilet to be exact, is depicted in all its rusty glory. Its lid is up and a plunger is poised on the rim of the commode. The plunger peers into the toilets depths with the craggy capable face of a mechanic. It turns to me as if sensing my gaze and waggles its, Groucho Marx eyebrows at me before leaping into the toilet. I keep watching, but nothing else happens.

The clock on the wall chimes loudly, tolling a total of seven times before falling deathly silent again. A glance at it confirms that it is indeed seven o'clock and I am late for work. I hurriedly tie my frizzy mop of brown hair into an approximation of a bun and squeeze myself into my uniform: skin tight black pants, high heel boots, and a low cut white T-shirt with a picture of two grinning beer mugs clinking in a toast. They occasionally wink at customers, especially if they are half-way decent tippers.

I designed the graphic myself which is the only reason, Dave hired me on in the first place, well that and my boobs. Most of the other waitresses have bigger ones, but mine are the only real ones from what I can tell. Gina Scott has by far the biggest, They point at me like inflatable spears as, Gina barrels down on me in her hostess uniform which is even more eye poppingly tight than the waitress version.

"You're late," she snarls. I try to formulate an excuse, but she cuts me off.

"I need you to take table three, Whinny," she says grinning the way only spiteful women can. I start to respond but she has already turned away. I walk over to the corner booth where four guys

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sit shoving and slapping each other with all the desperate exuberance of middle-aged men. I paste on a smile as plastic as, Gina's breasts as I approach them.

Hey guys, I'll be your server tonight. can I get you started with some drinks?"

"Those look good," the guy sitting closest to me says pointing at the cartoon mugs pictured on my shirt right above my breasts. He leers at me exposing his little yellow corn kernel teeth. The memory of the bills stacked in my purse weighs on me; reminding me that for now they have anchored me to this place, so I resist the urge to punch, Corn man's teeth down his throat.

"Okay, four, Big Dave ales coming up." I stuff my pad and pen in my back pocket and start for the bar.

"Whoa," Corn man shouts. I reluctantly turn back.

"I was just having a little fun with you baby," he continues

"Not as much fun as you want to have," says his pasty friend with a greying ponytail, which sends the whole table into braying laughter that wouldn't sound out of place in a barnyard. I smile sweetly and say loudly and cheerily as I lean in closer.

"Just so we're clear, I would rather stick my right hand in a wood chipper than sleep with any of you. Now that we have that out of the way, do you want to order or not?" The seconds stretch out in tense silence, them clenching their fists and squinting at me through beady little eyes and me standing with an eyebrow raised and my pen hovering over my pad.

Corn man flushes a deep crimson as he shoots to his feet and flaps his arms like an irate rooster.

He flags down, Gina who just happens to be passing by. She stops and smiles brightly at, Corn man and his cronies.

"is there a problem here gentlemen?" She asks in an artificially breathy voice that I think she believes is sexy, but that comes off as a creepy mix between, Tangina Barron and, Jessica Rabbit.

Corn man jabs an accusatory finger in my direction,

"She was rude to us for no reason, and this is supposed to be my birthday celebration." His lower lip quivers slightly, and for a moment I think he might actually cry.

"I do apologize for her, Whinny is our resident starving artist, she can get a little moody sometimes, constant failure and disappointment can do that to a person. But, here at Big Dave's Brewery we never let our customers leave disappointed. Your first round is on us, and I'm sure, Whinny won't give you any other reasons to be unhappy."

"That's fine, but we still want her to personally apologize to us for being such an uptight bitch." They all turn to me expectantly and I feel something inside me snap,

"of course," I say and snatch up two glasses of ale off the tray of a passing waitress. I hurl the first ale in, Corn man's face. "I truly apologize, and, don't worry it's on the house," I tell him as the second one splashes, Gina in the face and trickles down the deep cleft between her ample bosom. I march towards the exit ignoring the shouts and the smattering of applause that springs up behind me. At the doorway I pivot and give an idiotic little wave and curtsy. It isn't until I step onto the street that I realize what I've just done.

I pull my jacket tighter around me covering the treacherous mugs, their cartoonish grins feeling more like a personal insult as I slink back home. A lump forms in my throat as I think about my tiny studio that for all its faults has been my refuge, my little corner of calm where I have grown along with my drawings. I wonder what will happen to us as I walk up the stairs and suddenly feel a fondness for every crack and faded color I pass. For a moment I consider calling and begging

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for my job, but even if I could ignore my stinging pride, Gina is sleeping with the owner, and no one can hold a grudge like a wounded princess.

With a growing sense of resignation I push open the door, the tears I've been blinking back freeze up as I sense something different in the darkness. Something moves, a shadow pulling away from the others to resettle itself deeper in my home. The smart thing to do would be not to go in, but nothing I've done thus far tonight can be classified as smart.

I arrange my keys between my fingers and step in low and fast the way I always see that detective do in that show I binge watch those nights when neither inspiration, or sleep wants to come. Of course, she's usually armed with more than makeshift brass knuckles. I reach the spot where I last saw the figure and rise up from my crouch as I switch on the light.

I choke as I swallow the war cry on my lips. My keys fall from my fingers unnoticed as I stare at the sight in front of me. Somehow my ridiculous painting of, Joe's toilet has ripped itself free from the page and settled itself in the middle of my living room like a tasteless metaphor for this entire night.

I stretch my hand out tentatively and my fingers land on cold, solid porcelain.. I press down harder and wait for it to collapse, but it stays squatting on my living room floor.

I pull out my phone, snap a picture of the toilet, send it to, Joe and tell him to get his ass down here. There's nothing left to do, but wait. I settle myself down on the floor, back pressed against the wall. I'm eye level with the thing, well I would be if toilets had eyes. I don't know what I'm watching for, or what I would do if the toilet tried something, all I know is I don't want to let it out of my sight.

The sudden knock at the door nearly sends me into cardiac arrest until I remember my frantic message to, Joe. He's standing there, a huge grin on his face, looking so solid, and familiar that I almost forgive him for being so chipper while my world is crashing down.

"You called for a plumber?" he asks. I yank him inside and shut the door. He spots the toilet and his grin somehow widens.

"You did it," he says, wonder in his voice.

"I sure did, I drew a rusty toilet that is now taking up most of the space in here, and pretty soon I may not have anywhere to dump it since I got myself fired tonight." Joe just shakes his head as he walks towards it with something approaching reverence. He settles a foot inside the bowl and grins up at me when my painting doesn't dissolve. In this moment I want to erase it all: painting this replica of Joe's portal, yearning for more than my dead-end job, and letting Joe in. He extends his hand out to me and it's like I'm seven years old again.

The day we first met I had skipped school to execute my, run away and join the circus plan. The night before had been the fairy godmother fiasco and as I'd run from the auditorium with the sounds of panicked parents, and the sight of Gina Scott in her Cinderella ballgown clutching her face and screaming for my blood, I came across a poster advertising the circus. I hadn't noticed it at first, since the only reason I had stopped was that I thought I was going to puke from the exertion of crying and running so hard. I stood there, hunched over dry heaving, one hand resting on the poster when something in the picture moved and I felt something warm beneath my fingers. Slowly, I lifted my hand to see the tiger purring and straining to rub itself against my hand again. As I watched, the ring leader removed his big top hat and bowed to me in one sweeping motion as two acrobats flew gracefully above his head. That's when I'd had my big idea; I would go to the circus and pitch myself

as a RealD artist, I could already picture the crowds lining up to interact with RealD tigers, shriek in terror at the RealD ghosts in the haunted houses, and ou and aw over my RealD balloon animals.

That, of course is not the way it went down.

The second I was in I was assaulted by the riot of lights, smells, and music. A clown dressed in a black suit with long coat tails and with two foot high orange hair in the shape of a grinning skull tumbled in front of me and pulled a red and a yellow balloon from each sleeve. I watched with a growing unease as he inflated and folded the balloons into the shape of a dragon. He knelt before me so that I was eye to eye with the hair skull and held out the dragon to me like an offering. I reached for it like a second chance, my fingers wrapped around its red wings just as it deflated with an apocalyptic pop.

He shoved a needle into an orange eye socket before he and his hair gave me a knowing wink. He lifted both hands in a, "but wait there's more" gesture, pulled up his sleeves to indicate he wasn't hiding anything, and began to pull colored handkerchiefs from his mouth. He uncoiled them with a snap and I saw my drawings displayed on them before he fed one end of the tied handkerchiefs into the skulls mouth. The teeth came down with a sound like snapping bone as one by one my fledgling drawings disappeared under the slamming jaws. The lights dimmed and the music turned tinny as my ears rang and I felt myself slipping.

Suddenly a lanky boy with a wild shock of white blond hair and a large rolling backpack appeared in front of me. He positioned himself so that his body blocked my view of the clown and his hair skull. He pushed the handle of his pack down with a decisive smack that pulled me back from my swoon. Then he smiled at me and offered me his hand.

"My name is, Joseph Michael Jamison, salesman and inventor extraordinaire, and you look like you could use some "clown me not."" I just stared at him blankly, but he didn't seem to notice. He pulled a small spray bottle from his rolling backpack, keeping his hand over the label.

"One or two squirts should be enough to keep bozo's away," Joe had said as he sprayed what smelled suspiciously like mosquito repellent at me before tossing the bottle back into his backpack with a flourish.

Still, I noted with relief that the clown had indeed disappeared.

"I'm Winifred Amber Thomson, RealD artist and failed fairy Godmother."

"Well met, Whinny," He said with a smile. I think, Joe's smiles have always been what he's really sold and what people really wanted to buy in the first place. I smiled back at him and took his hand.

And now here he is again giving me that same smile that pulls me forward even when I feel frozen. I slip my hand into his,

"so, what now?" I ask.

"We see if we can't take it out for a spin," he says inclining his head towards the toilet handle. I shrug feeling silly, but my stomach does a nervous flip as I push down on the handle. Nothing happens and I feel a mixture of relief and disappointment,

"It didn't work, I guess you'll just have to keep trying to unplug your magic portal potty." Joe gives me a sheepish grin,

"You made it up" I accuse. He doesn't get a chance to answer, because just then the room starts spinning.

The place we wind up in is shockingly bright and tacky enough to make my retinas swoon. In front of us, stretched out on the lush crimson grass, is a slack jawed clown watching the neon clouds balloon across the purple sky. He hops to his feet at the sight of us and does his best soldier's salute. I feel like screaming as he grins his clownish grin, which I've always found blood curdling, and lopes straight for me with the awkward bumbling gait they somehow assume charming.

Joe, God bless him, steps between me and the clown who has begun hooting excitedly. He pastes on his friendliest, Joe smile, the one that's made him a successful salesman and says,

"Excuse me, friend we seem to be lost and I wonder if you could help us find our way." Famous last words I think, but am grateful to, Joe for the effort. Sudsy, at least I assume that's his name since it is printed on the daisy pinned to his chest in bubbly blue letters, ignores, Joe and points at me insistently while hopping up and down. I want more than anything to dive back inside the toilet, but my treacherous body has gone rigid with fear and all I can do is watch in horrified fascination as, Sudsy pulls many colored handkerchiefs out of his mouth. He unfurls them proudly displaying the sketches printed on each one. My jaw drops as I recognize my discarded drawings,

"Hey, those are mine. How did you get them?" I sputter, my outrage momentarily overcoming my fear. Instead of answering me, Sudsy blows an oversized bubble in the shape of an old fashion quill pen and holds it out to me.

"I think he wants your autograph," Joe says with a smirk.

"I don't give a damn what he wants. I want..." I forget whatever else I was about to say, because the air is suddenly filled with the sounds of honks, and odd shrieks. Clowns, hundreds of clowns, most of them on foot, but some piled on unicycles and into those freaky little cars, are stumbling and tumbling straight for us. To my credit I don't pass out, although it is admittedly a close thing, especially since even, Sudsy looks worried by the colorful mob headed our way

"On second thought we'll just try retracing our steps," Joe says. He takes me by the hand and guides me to the toilet. We position ourselves as before and I push down on the handle. We wait for our surroundings to dissolve into something else, anything else, but we remain, just a guy and a girl stuck with one foot in a toilet. And, now the clown caravan. is right on top of us. They know we're stuck too, their chatter takes on a new ominous glee.

Right before they close in, however, Sudsy springs into action. He blows an enormous bubble that encircles us like a soapy dome. The other clowns press against it, some of them striking it with whatever random items they'd been juggling or balancing on their noses, and yet the bubble holds. Sudsy puts his hand over mine and we push the lever together. This time it works.

We land in my living room hard enough to make the walls rattle. Mrs. Zikosky promptly begins to bang on the ceiling and shout for silence. Sudsy puts his ear to the carpet seemingly amazed by MRS. Zikosky's shrill threats to call the police if we don't shut up.

My panic seems to be a living thing clawing at my throat as I struggle to keep from falling apart. Joe doesn't seem to notice, or maybe he does, because he scoops me up with a whoop, spins me around and kisses me. I push him away, but I'm laughing now.

"We're so screwed and I'm the only one in this room sane enough to realize it," I say, but suddenly the panic is gone. The whole thing would be romantic if there wasn't a toilet and a clown in my Livingroom. Story of my life, I think, and burst out laughing again. Not to be out done, Sudsy jumps up and down, clapping and hooting like a manic game show contestant. Mrs. Zikosky has switched to yelling at us in Russian, punctuating her jabs at the ceiling with what I assume are curses.

"Well, we're back to where we started and I still don't know what I'm going to do," I say.

Sudsy looks serious all of a sudden. He blows two long bubbles and folds them into a dragon. My stomach drops, but I can't help myself; I reach out for it. The dragon lands gently onto my open palms before fluttering around us, briefly landing on some of my drawings that are scattered around the room, before finally coming to rest on the toilet. It bursts with an effervescent little pop that delights and saddens me in equal measures, and I know what I want to do. I look at, Sudsy who has his hands clasped behind his back and is pretending to whistle, the epitome of clown casual. I turn to, Joe and

find him looking uncharacteristically worried. I launch myself at, Joe, nearly knocking him over as I throw my arms around him and pull him in for a kiss.

“Who’s crazy now?” He laughs as I pull away.

“We all are, so what do you say we take our crazy train, or toilet, or whatever on the road boys?” Sudsy runs over making it a group hug, and just like that it’s settled.

If you look hard enough you can still find shining beacons of humanity who seem to light up a room with their brilliants. I am still not one of them. I am however, someone who’s managed to turn her failure into an art form, or a RealD circus if you want to get technical about it. I get to travel the world with my best friend, who is a natural born ring leader, although I may be a little bias on this point since I think I might love him. And, I’ve even managed to conquer my coulrophobia, that’s fear of clowns for those of you who don’t want to get technical about it, thanks to, Sudsy. And his endearing, if still mildly creepy antics.

We are flawed, as imperfect as it is possible to be; which is why we know something those golden people never will. Every night we do our best to pass it on. This is what we know, and what we want to show others how to do as we take our RealD circus on the road, traveling the world in our portal-potty: we know how to keep reaching for second chances.