

Owen Duplisea

Ms. Stein

English 12A

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Man Down

I can't believe I made it out of high school! Is what I say to myself when walking to the podium. "Congratulations, Tom." my principal said.

Looking at the crowd of my friends and family and old teachers I knew the future was going to be bright. And tonight is going to be brighter. I sat back down next to my best friend, John, who was also awarded his diploma. 13 years of learning and tests to possibly go back to another 4-6. But this is the first big step to becoming an adult.

"Are you going to Alaina's party tonight?" John asks me quietly.

"For sure. Are you driving?" I responded.

He nods in affirmation. A moment later our principal stands at the podium to congratulate all of us. We stand and toss our caps into the air. We are so excited that our independent lives have begun. Everything is now new to explore from here on out. All of our parents look at us from afar with happy tears in their eyes.

We all disperse from our chairs to hug and talk to family and friends. A bittersweet moment for us. All the 'I'm so proud of you,' to the 'can't believe you're all grown up.' *I can't believe my childhood is over.*

While in the car going to Alaina's house party, John and I couldn't stop talking about how many of these parties we'd attend over our college years.

“Tom, I’m told these parties get better when you’re older. Especially when you’re out of the house.” John says while focusing on the road.

“Oh for sure, Bud. Can’t wait for those to come around.”

We arrived in John’s little red car, and Alaina greets us at the door with a red solo cup in hand.

“You guys are late,” she says looking at the nonexistent watch on her wrist.

“It’s 8:30. We wanted to spend some time with family,” I said.

“Okay well you can come on in,” Alaina gracefully stumbles back into the house.

Old friends who I haven’t seen since middle school, or early high school are lounging around the living room. Elliot from band, Cynthia from cheer, and Marc. Marc was usually quieter.

“Hey guys, welcome. Tonight I’m your personal bartender.” Marc says as he sticks out his hand to shake. “What would you both like to drink?”

“How’s it going Marc? I’ll take something simple and strong.” John said, looking at me.

“I’ll take the same thing.” *I never usually drink with friends. This will be a lot of fun.*

An hour passes. Or I think it’s an hour. Cynthia starts telling gossip from cheer while Marc is mixing some of the heaviest drinks I’ve had. Elliot tries to play an old banjo he found in the basement, so we all join in and start singing some song. Later I stumble up to the kitchen to grab a snack. I look around for John.

“John? John?” I repeat a few more times. I hear a grunt coming from the couch.

“They have no more milk. The store opens in 2 hours, I think I can go early.” he says as I slide into the love seat beside him. My eyes are heavy. I can’t keep them open. “I’ll be right here.” is what I think John says to me when I pass out on the very uncomfortable chair.

The next morning I wake up from the light peering in through the open window. The scent of mud came from outside. *New day, new graduated class*, I think as I rise from the chair. Cynthia comes up from the basement with Elliot following behind her.

“Where’s John?” she asks.

“I think he said I’ll be right here.” I reply pointing to the couch. My eyes start to look around the room for him. Then I remember him saying something about having no milk.

“Did he say anything to you, Elliot?” I ask.

“Not that I can remember, why?”

I stand up and start frantically looking for his keys. I check the cushions, the counter, the basement and the makeshift bar Marc used. I walk outside and realize his car wasn’t there. I rub my eyes thinking my mind is playing tricks on me. Looking up and down the street 5 or 6 times to see if I could find his car. No luck. Cynthia came outside next to me, “Did he go home?”

“I don’t know. That’s why I’m looking for him.”

I wake up to the sound of sirens nearby. *Why would there be sirens near my house? We live in a safe neighborhood.* Sitting up to see a missed call from Tom, John’s friend. *I hope everything went alright at Cynthia’s last night.* I pick up the phone and call Tom back.

“Hello?” I say into the phone as I get up and walk towards the window.

“Hello? Carl, it’s me Tom. Did John come home last night?”

My heart drops. *Why doesn’t he know where John is?* I quietly hang up the phone with the unanswered question from Tom. Walking down the stairs and open the front door to walk

outside to hear the sounds of sirens are more prominent. Step by step I get closer to the truth that I yearn to know, but never want to uncover. Walking to the edge of the driveway I look to my left to see a little red car wedged between two trees and firefighters carrying someone out of the backseat door. The only door that could be opened.

Standing there at the end of my driveway, the sounds all around me seem to go silent. The sirens, the crying, the running. My eyes stare forward, blank. Unable to fully understand what's going on. My wife pulls on my arm, yet I don't really feel or hear her. Looking to my right I see Tom, silently staring.

This isn't what he deserved.