Shift Notes

by

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This story takes place in a Community Living Arrangement, one of many licensed homes operated by a Catholic behavioural health non-profit, offering various levels of care to individuals with ID. The homes aim to allow individuals to live independently within a community setting. Depicted within the document is a nondescript home located in a middle to upper class suburban neighbourhood. At any given time, the home accommodates a maximum of three. Because of the ADA approved layout of the home—two first-floor bedrooms with wheelchair accessible bathroom—individuals with mobility restrictions are given priority to first-floor rooms. The home requires around-the-clock supervision.
The introductory slide on the projector read: *The corporal and spiritual works of mercy are the business of our lives.* It was orientation day. At promptly 8am the new employees were instructed to form a single-file line for photo IDs, then to return to their seats and sign paperwork, beginning with the W2 form. The day droned from one state-regulated PowerPoint to the next. HIPAA, OSHA, drivers’ safety, fleet policy, how to properly remove a pair of non-latex gloves. The instructor reminded the new employees that while the individuals they serve may be elder, the counselor maintains a position of authority. This was Staff’s first job in human services. He didn’t know what to expect. He worried, for his face now represented the organization.

Staff parked in the gated lot, pressed the buzzer at the locked glass door. “Here for Crises Management,” he said to the voice of security. There was a buzz and a click. He entered into a narrow, white hallway of closed, white doors. Took the elevator to the second floor, found classroom 213, sat in the back row, and leafed through the packet, an outline of self-defence techniques. Pacing the front of the classroom, two instructors greeted employees as they filled three long rows of desks. The fluorescent lights hummed a bit and Staff hoped to habituate to the incessant grating. “Dr. Quick to Building Three DAS,” reverberated from the intercom. The instructors locked eyes. The one with a flip phone clipped to his belt gave one slow head nod, and the other rushed out of the room. Soon after, the remaining instructor cleared his throat, “good morning,” he brought both hands to his chest, “Doug Smith, security consultant, been with the company twenty-five years. My colleague and co-instructor Sam Kope responded to a crisis call and will return when the situation has deescalated. For the new employees, Dr. Quick is the internal crises response system. Now to start, I’d like you each to introduce yourselves, names, job titles, locations, and how long you’ve been with the company.” Introductions took most of the morning Mr. Kope returned red faced, just in time to begin the PowerPoint presentation, an overview of the categories of physical threats they’d learn to respond to: hair pulls, bites, strangling, hitting, kicking, striking with a weapon. Run if possible was the ideal response to each threat.
Front and center, Mr. Smith stood with his right foot in front of his left, hips squared and hands resting on them, “this is the power stance, your go to posture.” He gestured for the class to rise and mimic his power stance, then stood eye to eye with an employee, “act as if you’re going to punch me in the face,” he said driving his fist slowly towards the employee’s face. The employee mimicked the strike, which Mr. Smith blocked with his forearm, pivoted and ran. Again, he stood eye to eye with the same employee, “put your hands around my neck as if you’re choking me.” The employee reached for Mr. Smith’s neck, but Mr. Smith lifted his arms and swung them out, pushing the employee’s hands away from his neck. Again, he pivoted and ran. The class paired up and practiced blocking strikes, chokes, pivoting and running. Next in the packet, hair pulls and bites. “Same approach to both,” Mr. Smith said, “if you’re being bitten, press the biters head into the bite. If your hair is being pulled, press the puller’s hand into your head. Simple as that.” The class broke for lunch and returned to the windowless classroom an hour later. Mr. Kope had joined Mr. Smith for the final demonstration. “Physically restraining a consumer is only ever to be used if all other non-restrictive interventions have been exhausted. This restraint requires two staff to be involved. Mr. Kope, here, has returned to assist me in restraining one of you disruptive employees. Who would like to volunteer?” To Staff’s surprise, most employees raised their hands.

Staff parallel parked facing down the slope. Walked to the building with the company’s emblem stuck in the mud. Another buzzer. “Here for Medication Administration.” The glass door clicked and Staff pushed it open. He signed in with an administrator in the basement, sat in another windowless conference room, for another two-day training, with another instructor. This one an RN. Again, with a PowerPoint. Listless faces. Staff sipped his coffee. People’s lives would soon be under his watch. He flipped through the packet jotting notes with each slide.
According to the RN, each employee was bound to have at least one medication error within their career. Missed dosage. Double dosage. Toxicity. Three errors within a quarter was grounds for termination. MARs were to be signed with the administration of any medication. Controlled substances were to be counted and signed off on at the beginning and end of each shift. Consumers with seizure disorders had individualized seizure protocol in their file. After lunch, the employees paired up. Staff never knew that pills came in bubble packs, he’d only ever seen them in bottles. The RN observed each pair role play counselor passing medications to the consumer. She tapped her foot and jotted notes on her clipboard. The day ended with a multiple-choice exam. Employees were required to complete their certification with an on-site observation. On the course evaluation, Staff noted that, above all, he learned the importance of documentation.

Same buzzer, sign in, windowless classroom. CPR dolls were strewn across the floor. Cindy Welsh, the instructor was petite in stature, not in demeanor. She spoke with compassion to employees and towards consumers. “Never get weary of doing what is good,” Staff soon found to be her refrain. Her frizzed out bangs embodied the burn out she refused to yield to. In the service of others. Always, in the service of others.
A beer bellied man with ball cap bill pulled over his eyes snored in a chair, as employees seeped into the same windowless conference room that Medication Administration and CPR were in. At 8am, he woke and introduced himself, had just worked an overnight shift. “We’ll begin by watching Heart Saver First Aid, by the American Heart Association, the acting is terrible, but information is good,” he pressed play, skipped the public health ad on YouTube, sat and soon resumed a soft snore. Most employees slouched into their chairs, tapped and watched their phones. Clearing the scene and delegating a colleague or consumer to dial 911 were the first steps to almost all emergencies. “You just have to act responsibly when you have a victim,” the woman in the dramatization said to an employee who inquired about becoming a First Aid responder. Staff hoped to never need to remember the appropriate response to any of the medical emergencies. He worried someone might cease on his watch. Would he be able to help if an individual had a heart attack, heat stroke, seizure?

At this point, Staff knew he’d be observing medications and responding to crises, maybe even physically defending himself. “Here for Behavior Management,” he said into the speaker. The buzz, click, and he’s allowed back to into the narrow white hallways, windowless room. Cindy Welsh stood, front and center, smiling like a superego. During introductions, she asked each employee to share their job site and how long they’d been there. When Staff disclosed his information, Cindy mentioned that he’d be the only male staff there, but expected “the ladies” would respond well to a man, and that they’d jolt him from laughter to tears within seconds. She followed a PowerPoint, but went off script during each slide. “All behavior has purpose. Note, the consumer who used to straighten wire hangers and stick them into his penis,” an action Staff identified as sounding. Erotic for some, but not this consumer. He was nonverbal, had a UTI, and was trying to scratch an itch. “No matter how much your person is misbehaving, you cannot bribe them. Bribes are a no no. We aren’t trying to control the individuals we serve. If your person wants to watch Antiques Roadshow when the new episode of The Bachelor is airing, remember, this is not your house. How would you like to be told what to do in your home?” Cindy brought her fist to a front row desk and it thudded like a gavel.
Staff knocked on the front door of a faded pastel blue house with yellow trim around the windows. He’d driven by the place hundreds of times under the assumption it was a family home. A woman with short salt and pepper hair opened the door, “Hello, you must be the new evening shift.” She introduced herself as Evening Staff. “You’ll be working with me,” she said, and invited him into what was a large living room filled with couches and pictures. She gave him a tour. Immediately to the right was Angie’s bedroom, but she wasn’t home yet, all the consumers were still at day program. To the left of the couch was the dining room, connected to the kitchen. To the right of the couch was a hallway of doors. One leading to the second floor, another the staff office, Sally’s bedroom, and a stairway to Lora’s bedroom, a powder room, and unused office. The first-floor hallway opened up into another living room area and bathroom at the back of the house. This back-living room was squat with a television and two brown suede couches facing each other. Evening Staff recognized the sound of the front door swinging open and closed, “Lora must be home.” She walked back towards the front of the house, “Lora’s usually is the first to arrive.” Staff followed her to the front of the house where Lora stood in front of the couch, staring down at it with a pouty lower lip. Evening Staff introduced Staff to Lora, but she continued her gaze into the couch, her coat in one arm only. Soon after Sally and Angie arrived and greeted Staff with smiles. Evening Staff instructed Staff to read through the consumers’ files while she made fish sticks and tater tots for dinner.

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Staff sat together in the office, the smallest of the first-floor bedrooms, sandwiched between two bedrooms. State regulations and phone numbers lined the off-white, paneled walls. They sat at the oversized desks facing each other. “We’re required to take notes on each consumer for each shift,” Evening Staff flipped through the Penny Saver.
In the funeral home, Staff stood with Sally’s family recalling the time Sally’s mother visited and wore a new wig, a red updo and Lora told her she looked like a woodpecker. We laughed. Lora spent most of the visit looking at picture collages and flowers, reading cards of condolence. Staff decided it was time to take Lora back to the CLA, when she became lost in a gaze fixed on the casket, telling herself she should have been nicer to her roommate, shouldn’t have bopped Sally over the head.

The 11 o’clock news reigned terror over shift switch. “Kids killing kids. This world’s going to shit,” Evening Staff stated. She reached for a cat-marijuana-print cup, sipped it. She lived in McKeesport, the neighborhood where this kid killed this kid. Ever since her cousin was robbed on her front porch she’s kept a gun in her purse. She rose from the lumpy couch, walked through the unlit hallway past snoring doors, she flipped the hood on her hoodie, RECOVERY AGENT printed bold across the back of her.
Every other hour Rose stumbled through the hallway without her walker, wearing a new accessory: cowboy boots, beaded necklaces, a wide brimmed zebra print hat. Staff explained the HW benefits of getting 8 hours of sleep. “What would you like to do?” he asked. A long blank stare. “I don’t want to go to bed,” she yelled to his back when Staff turned to leave the room. At 3:49am, Staff tried his colleague’s approach, uttered a firm and staccato, “Go to bed.”

Staff PU Rose and Lora from an Exceptional Adventures outing. He made a left onto Green Tree Road, a congested four lanes. He turned into what he thought was a center turning lane, when a woman driving in the left lane rolled her window down and called Staff an asshole. He safely merged and they drove side by side. The woman drove next to Staff calling him an asshole. “Fuck you,” Staff spouted, and immediately regretted it. He shouting became louder. “Stop it you hyena,” Rose yelled from the backseat.
Staff changed Jane’s pastel, umbrella bedding and washed all soiled linens on hot with pine sol. Jane grabbed Staff’s arm as he zipped her coat, and tickled his inked-up: “That’s nice…I like it.” Staff engaged Jane in her desire for a tattoo. She wanted a bird. Jane reported that she liked the coffee Staff made her. Air Star Access arrived at 7:19am. The driver strapped her wheelchair into place, then drove her to day program, another building to sit in, to be pushed around in and out of by individuals salaried to serve.

Evening Staff retrieved the mail and opened a letter addressed to Rose containing a card and a family portrait. Staff handed Rose the letter and photograph while she waited at the table for dinner. “Where’re you at?” Evening Staff asked. Rose pointed to an infant in the arms of a stern-faced woman. Rose smiled and laughed in a way that Staff had never before witnessed. She communicated the memory of how she never wanted to walk even though she was able, and even impersonated her parents telling her, “Rose, you have to walk!”
Upon returning from day program, Lora dubbed Staff the hat man. She went to the living room television and put on Jerry Springer. Staff sat on the couch across from her and watched as he waited for Rose and Jane to also return. A proposal. A man on his knee slid a band onto a woman’s finger. “There’s something I have to tell you,” she said, “I had sex with my friend.” The man stood up. “You’ve never supported my transition,” she said. “I’m a gay man. I want a man, not some guy in a wig.” Her friend stormed the stage and slapped the fucker in the face.

Lora pointed to Staff’s chin, “SC!” she squealed, throwing her arms into the air. Staff didn’t see the resemblance between his patchy auburn beard and Santa Clause’s, but was delighted by the recognition.
Staff arrived at 11pm to Evening Staff withholding Lora’s snack because she refused to shower, hadn’t showered since Friday, and it was now Monday. “I wish I could smack her ass like she was my own kid,” Evening Staff said. Lora yelled at Rudy Huxtable. Staff engaged her in her refusal to shower. Lora didn’t make eye contact, but stopped yelling at the chair. He explained the HW benefits of showering. Lora grabbed a towel and nightgown, went into the bathroom. The water ran for a few minutes, then Lora exited the bathroom with dry hair. Staff gave her a Little Debbie.

Staff arrived at 11pm to Evening Staff withholding Lora’s snack because Lora refused to shower. Staff communicated that Lora showered at midnight the previous night, but Evening Staff observed that none of Lora’s towels were used. Staff asked if Lora had tricked him the previous night, to which she confirmed. Staff offered his cookie dough ice cream as incentive. Lora grabbed a towel and nightgown. The water ran for a while, until Lora slid the pocket door open with wet hair, asked for her ice cream.
April 2015

Rose woke early and emptied her wardrobe into a heap on her plastic-covered bed. Overnight Staff shook her head as she put blouses and slacks back on velvet hangers. Staff had just arrived for a daylight shift. He served Rose breakfast then helped Overnight Staff finish hanging Rose’s clothes.

“Help me,” Rose screamed. The sound of her walker thundering down the hall. Her whining, a new constant. Regressed to infant, whimpering for help on the toilet, to get dressed, when sitting on the recliner, laying on her plastic-covered bed, wherever she was she screamed for help. Staff tried to fill in the language based on a limited psychiatric history and the 37.5 hours a week with Rose. He wondered about the things Rose couldn’t or wouldn’t speak about.
At 1:51am, Lora’s screaming tunneled through the ceiling-vent. Staff knocked on Lora’s bedroom door. She answered with sobs, was on the floor in child’s pose. Staff asked if she was okay. She sobbed into the carpet. Staff kneeled next to her and put his hand on her shoulder. She lifted her head, “I lost my tooth.” She was referring to the tooth that rotted and was pulled two months ago. Staff knew this wasn’t about the tooth. It was about absence. About what had been taken, and bloodied.

Staff used a damp paper towel to wipe the dried chocolate from Lora’s face. “That’s what Mommy did,” she reported. Staff received a personal phone call at 10:59pm from his aunt informing him that the police arrested his father at his home.
“Wait till you work there, two of the men think they’re women,” Evening Staff reported about her training at another site. Staff tried to go to his happy place—a technique also used while changing diapers. “Coco,” she laughed, “that’s what one of them likes to be called. He has HIV. I don’t know how you get that, but I don’t want to find out,” she pointed to an empty bottle of Purell, “see this? I used the entire bottle after I left that place.” Staff attempted to calm the boiling pot of lobsters within him. She continued, “he, she, whatever.” Staff started hoping she didn’t suspect the lack of bulge in his sweatpants to be anything other than a small dick. “The other one’s on hormones & has tits. I wouldn’t have even known it was really a man if the staff hadn’t told me.” “You don’t have to be a sounding board for her bigotry,” his therapist suggested escaping by using the bathroom or making a phone call. But Staff was paralyzed at the thought of being found to be a he, she, whatever.

Staff’s family used to take hockey sticks to the beach at night to slap shot crabs. As an adult Staff sat surrounded by crabs side-stepping out of sand burrows, then hid when a man carrying a rod and cooler walked in front of Staff, feet gone to the sand. “Best time of day,” the man tipped his hat to the sun. Staff agreed as ghosts peered out their holes—the heat not something a shell alone can protect against. Summer beach days spent underneath in networks, hidden from the sweeping tides. It’s all a ritualized competition, really, this choreographed aggression, this preening. Birds flew in arc formation above the ascending golden blush.
“I didn’t ask you because I just want to know. I can’t tell you why. I don’t know what it is. I just couldn’t feel,” she reported to Staff after watching an episode of Untold Stories from the ER in which a team of doctors and nurses worked together to remove a camp stove from a man’s penis. She refused to wake for day program. Staff began prompting her to wake at 7:15am. She told Staff he was sloppy.

Rose reclined wearing a red plaid nightgown with a blue vest and straw brim hat, while watching the Golden Girls with her roommate Jane. After lunch, Staff showered Jane, then pushed her into the living room, where Rose reclined, now wearing a pair of black slacks and an unzipped, pink vest with no undershirt or brazier underneath, just an assortment of beaded necklaces.
Evening Staff reminisced on the name change of a special needs organization she volunteered for fifteen years prior. It was originally called Together for Retarded Youth, and on outings, they were all mandated to wear t-shirts that said exactly that in bold font. Their name had since been redacted to TRY.

Staff attended a Service Leaders training course. “Hurt people hurt people,” The Instructor lectured on trauma and its effects on behavior. Staff spent the sunny day pondering the varying degrees to which we each become whips.
Staff accepted a collect call from his father. It was the first time they’d spoken in the nine months his he’d been in county. He told Staff he attempted to get transferred to the pod his cousin David was on, but David was in maximum security. “It’s not looking good for him,” Staff’s father said. A pause. Staff never knew how to fill the silence and why should it look good for a man who killed his wife? “Things like this happening make me worry about your brother.” Staff was surprised they shared the same concern. Living in a cage was the only thing that freed his father from the dope. A world full of things and people that kill things and people. David killed Donna. His DA reported that he loved his wife, very much, but Staff refused to believe that love was homicide. In his family they were hunters, but without the 10-point buck taxidermy on the living room wall. They were hunted: gutted, spilling blood trails across the south suburbs of Pittsburgh.

Staff dreamt he assisted Jane in the bathroom. He struggled to put on a pair of purple, non-latex gloves. The woman who touched him in his last dream walked into the bathroom, slipped the gloves onto her hands, said she got it. Staff wanted desperately to be able to help Jane, but felt helpless to his own hands. The woman wept into a different room, so Staff slipped the gloves on and transferred Jane from her wheelchair to the toilet, but she slipped from his hands and fell to the floor. Staff lifted her, her body felt unusually limp. Jane slid off the toilet. Feces smeared on Jane, all over her, her hands, and she gripped Staff for support. Her head bled. Feces on his both of them. He instructed Jane to stay put on the toilet while he asked the weeping woman for help.
Staff eavesdropped on a conversation between his aunt and grandmother. “The inmates on David’s pod call him Podfather,” because he’s old and wise or some shit, “the murderers & rapists looked to David for advice,” on the pod where individual lineages of violence convene and war, “it’s kind of funny.”

Staff watched Lock Up while all consumers slept. An inmate dipped in his cell, palms gripping his bed as he pumped himself up and down, his tattooed triceps popping against cinderblock. The square window behind him, a glimpse of the Cincinnati skyscape. The inmate said when people are put in cages like animals, animal behavior will be a product of that captivity. Staff agreed with this philosophy. At the center of the cell pod the same inmate beat a rhythm onto a stainless-steel table. The other inmates peered out of their cell windows. “I’ll piss on your grave before I bring flowers to you,” he rapped a soft falsetto. “Do you know how it feels to be locked in a cell?” He sang his mouth to smirk. Legs swayed to the beat. Within a month he assaulted three inmates, denied all accusations of sucker punching. Handcuffed in a holding cell, he paced, swaying his arms to the cuff’s allowance, claiming innocence, eating up his fifteen minutes, preening in the visibility.
The sound of rustling in Rose’s closet. Every hour Staff redirected Rose from her closet to bed. “Take your shoes off and go to bed,” Staff directed at 4:13am and she finally slept. At 6:30am Staff woke her. She was wearing two blouses, blue checkered slacks, and a purple cheetah cowboy hat. Blouses and nightgowns scattered across her bed.

Staff dreamt that Rose was in the bathroom, pants around her ankles, squatting as if onto the toilet, but she wasn’t near the toilet, she was in the shower. Staff attempted to intervene by screaming “No!” Stepped towards her as if to catch her, but her butt sat as if a toilet was underneath. She fell into the corner of the shower, hit her head, and shrunk to the size of an infant with swollen black eyes. Jane woke up, stumbled to the toilet, and vomited on the floor. Rose rolled her infant body around the bathroom while staff tried to reach 911, but the call wouldn’t connect.
December 2015

Rose had an accident in her black slacks. Staff cleaned her and changed her clothing. She fixated on the black slacks, needed to wear them. Staff explained the slacks needed to be washed. Rose pulled the slacks from her dirty clothes hamper and draped them over her walker. She became agitated when Staff washed them with pine sol.

After dinner Lora sat at the table and wrote names on a blank sheet of loose leaf paper. Yesterday she’d taped her employee of the week award to the quarter-walled floral-striped wallpaper below the trim, and below a photo of her and Shell. In the photo, Lora sat in the seat she’s sat in for the decade she’s lived at the CLA, Shell, in her wheelchair posed next to Lora. Shell had her arm around Lora’s neck. Their heads were together, all smiles amid the outdated interior. Yesterday’s list included Rachel and Rudy, which meant Lora was having a bad day. But today “coming down the aisle, Lora.” Her forearms pounded the table and she cried, then stopped, “what is this thing?” she asked stroking her chin. “A goatee,” Staff replied and prompted her to take her meds. She stuck her tongue out laughed.
Staff sat at the table with Lora and Jane. He asked Lora what she thought about his new loch ness monster tattoo. “That’s cool man. Rudy is not a penguin,” Lora chuckled. Jane asked Staff who worked the shift after him. Staff answered the question for a couple hours before playfully saying take a guess.

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Staff was shadowed by a Casual Pool trainee. He prepared Tuna Helper, while Casual Pool reviewed consumer casefiles. He handed her Lora’s file to which she stated that Lora had Down Syndrome so she knew all she needed to know. After dinner, Staff observed Casual Pool observing Lora taking her medications. Casual Pool wouldn’t allow Lora to take them with soda. Lora threw her five bubble packs of pills at Casual Pool. Staff separated the two and debriefed with each of them individually.
February 2016

Jane wobbled on her heels and almost fell when Staff pivoted her from her wheelchair to the toilet. Staff held her shoulders to stop her from falling, guided her hands to the grab bar. This made him feel strong. Staff asked Lora if she wanted pizza for lunch. “I love you,” her answer.

At 1:18am Christmas music blared down the stairwell. Jane and Rose were both sleeping. Lora sat topless in the upstairs hallway in front of her boom box. From the bottom of the stairwell Staff asked Lora to please turn off the music and get some sleep. She refused to wake up for day program.
Staff’s father celebrated his 47th birthday in County Jail. Clean. During their last collect call he told Staff an inmate bit off another inmate’s ear because he wanted to watch a different TV show. The sun behind the passing clouds as Staff sat in Mt. Lebanon Cemetery. Light then dark Staff sat in the shining with the forgotten slated stones. Spirit underground, sunken into the hillside stones slouched forward. Staff sat on top of corpses waiting for the cratered veil to awaken the things inside him that had been killed.

On Staff’s day off Lora’s father passed away. Staff read the news in the communications log. It was 11:31pm, but Staff could hear Untold Stories of the ER through the ceiling vent so he told her he was sorry. “My life is broken for him.” Staff’s eyes welled wet, wouldn’t let himself cry with her. A tree was struck by lightning and fell onto the company Chrysler.
From 11pm to 3:33am Rose whimpered in bed. At 3:17am Staff assisted her in the bathroom and changed her pullup. He noticed Rose’s loose skin, the way it desperately pulled in and out with each gasp of breath. Staff prepared and served breakfast, while pondering the varying degrees to which they’re each in and out of control of biology.

Easter Sunday: Access arrived for Jane at noon. At 1:15pm Jane’s sister called to ask if Jane was on her way. Staff’s stomach sank. He called Access to find Jane’s bus had broken down and she was awaiting a transfer. Lora’s sister picked her up at 2:00pm. They buried their father on Good Friday. Lora didn’t want to get out of bed, but her sister promised Dairy Queen. Jane’s sister called at 2:30pm to confirm Jane’s arrival. Rose sat on the couch staring out the front door waiting for her sister for three hours. Across the street, girls in pastel dresses scavenged the yard for eggs. A spider dangled from the dusty ceiling fan. Staff removed his tattered Vans, held one in each hand, crushed it.
Rose’s sister called at 9:47pm, but Rose was mouth open, dentures falling out asleep. She insisted Staff wake her, didn’t want Rose to think she’d forgotten her. Staff woke Rose and handed her the phone. She held it to her ear and listened and Staff gave her a few moments of privacy to listen to her sister talk about her day and ask about Rose’s. When he returned Rose handed him the phone, her sister’s voice coming out of the receiver: “Hello, Rose. Are you there?”

“I quit speaking last year. My caretakers blame dementia. I wish dementia is when the confusion began. In 1949, my family sent me to The State Institution for the Feebleminded of Western Pennsylvania. Nobody thought I could count the years. Was left there until 1974. Felt the time swell then harden somewhere deep within my large intestine. Still I avoid sleep. Stomach knots when the mean people tell me to go to bed. Unhang my entire wardrobe—three closets and dresser of blouses, slacks, nightgowns and braziers—into a heap on my plastic covered bed. The dark damp pf the halls. The sarcastic tic toc. Thank God for the Golden Girls.”
Staff woke Lora up at 7:15am. She opened her eyes and pointed to the 8x11 portrait of Bill Cosby on her nightstand. “That’s the man I love.” Staff engaged Lora about her love. “He died,” she said. Bill Cosby’s a rapist. They quit airing his show on television. Staff didn’t explain any of this to Lora.

During breakfast Jane asked Staff to retrieve her glasses. Staff retrieved Jane’s glasses and handed them to Rose. Jane laughed a lot. She was in good spirits this morning. “Rudy’s lost without her daddy,” Lora sobbed her wet face into the cushions, then stood, “Steve Harvey, will you marry me?” She repeated the question, the second time with open and outstretched arms, her tears turned to laughter and snot ran into her smile.
Staff woke Jane at 6:15am and she pointed to Staff’s chest: “WHITE TRASH.” Jane reported that she liked the shirt. Staff assisted Jane with her morning ADLs. She ate eggs for breakfast with her roommate Rose. Jane continued to tell Staff that she liked his shirt. She demanded he give it to her.

Lora was upset about Rudy. Staff asked what’s with all the drama. “It’s not drama. It’s Family Feud.” At 11:11pm Staff realized that the days were blurring together and serving had become an escape.
Staff’s grandmother accepted a collect call from his father. “He’s been transferred to Western Penitentiary. To serve his sentence with the rats. During his commute from Camp Horn they stayed a night at another correctional facility at Laurel Highlands, beautiful.” Beautiful prison? “He couldn’t get a phone on your brother’s birthday.” Guess he’s no buddy.

“You might not be alive if I’d stayed with your father,” Staff’s mother joked. “72% of marriages end in divorce, you guys fucked up,” his brother clapped back. Staff laughed along. Shame games disguised as love. Masking guilt with merriment.
Things that’d disappeared:

1. A purse with $28 in it that Staff left in the back seat of his family Pontiac in the parking lot of Century III Mall. Staff’s father told him he shouldn’t have left his purse there.

2. The guitar amp Staff’s father bought his children. Staff asked where it went and Staff’s father had no idea, it must have rocked itself out of the house. Heartbroken by its absence, Staff quit asking about all missing items from this moment on.

3. The family Pontiac. Found by Staff’s mother and aunt in Wilkinsburg, with new rims, filled with toys and car seats. Police told Staff’s mother that since the title was in her name, legally it was hers to drive home, which she did. Later, Staff’s mother received a phone call on their landline from a man who wanted his possessions and had met Staff once, knew where they lived. Staff’s mother and the man came to an agreement. They met in a parking lot. Staff’s mother brought her body builder cousin-in-laws.

4. Ford Explorer repossessed with bullet holes. Auctioned for $1000. Staff remembered when they test drove and bought it slightly used from Ford.

5. The quarters Staff patiently awaited and placed in his state quarter collection book.

6. The cash Staff had saved in the wooden lockbox he’d made in 7th grade woodshop. Finishing nails pried by the claw of a hammer. Desperation bent the latch.

7. Savings Bonds. Staff’s father persuaded Staff to cash his then lend the money him to buy a part for an HVAC job.

8. The gold peace sign necklace, last seen wrapped around the praying neck of Staff’s Buddha. Staff was a child when his father gave him the necklace, bought it from his friend Mike Fior’s jewelry store, or so the tale goes.

At 12:11am Staff noticed his colleague’s pen was inscribed Let Go and Let God.
While eating two slices of cold cinnamon bread with peanut butter, Lora reported Rudy used to have her father, Bill Cosby. Staff asked what happened to him. Lora threw her arms into the air, “He just passed out.”

Staff arrived at 11pm and greeted Lora in the living room. “All I want is to be loved,” she sobbed sucking her left nostril shut, “He won’t be with me.” Her life had become TV.
Staff attended his bi-annual physical. The Doctor asked if he’d had any surgeries, to which Staff confirmed: “double-mastectomy and hysterectomy.” Admittedly, The Doctor was caught off guard, and asked if Staff had full reconstruction. “Okay then. We don’t have to do that exam.”

In the dream, two personal trainers greeted Staff in the driveway. Staff wanted to know how to blast his lats like their, a nice hard V. Both trainers left and returned with a pull-up machine and grease-spotted bag of McDonalds. “One single pull up,” the trainer with the bag instructed, chomped on a fistful of fries, then both trainers disappeared. Staff sprang in to one mighty front flip, landed on top of the machine. He wished the trainers were there to assist his return to the ground. All that remained of them was this machine and a grease-spotted bag. “Hold onto the leaves,” a voice advised, so Staff grabbed the closest and sturdiest branch with which to descend. He wrapped his body around like a big spoon and lowered himself to the ground where he ate a cheeseburger, McNuggets, and fries.
brother of former Olympics and World Wrestling Entertainment Inc., pleaded guilty on Tuesday to killing his wife… Staff clicked the bait, 911 Call at 6:22 am:

She was smacking me. I was smacking her.

She fell to the floor. I had my knee on her chest, not long, but long enough, I guess.

I tried to revive her and I can’t get her back. It’s been ten minutes.

The medical examiner determined asphyxiation killed Donna.

Common Pleas Judge sentenced David… on one count of voluntary manslaughter for the death of his wife, Donna… in their…home… 2 ½ to 10 years served, 10 years probation.

Action 4 News Presented the DA’s Report:

It was really a product of alcohol and there was a domestic fight, where she started slapping him. And he stopped her from doing that. His knees were on her chest and basically she suffocated. And he was intoxicated and it was almost accidental.

He’s in complete disbelief that he doesn’t have his wife.

They’ve been married twenty-seven years.

He loves her.

He misses her and is devastated by what happened.

.:.
Staff and his brother used to have slumber parties with David and Donna’s kids. Donna once told them falling asleep with a song stuck in their head and waking with that same song in their head was fatal. It’s not funny. David killed Donna with his hands in the home they slumbered in. The home Staff fell asleep and woke with No Doubt in his head. Tossed and turned on their couch all night. Worried he’d die on their couch. Hands vowed to love and cherish in sickness and in health. Voluntary manslaughter did them part. Where was Donna’s obituary? Where was Donna? Staff Googled her name. Search results detailed her death, emphasis on perpetrator.

“Why are you in my business?” Staff asked Lora as she hovered over him, while he sat in the office eating ghost pepper fries from Wendy’s. “I’m not in your information. I’m not looking at you in the eyes.” Staff tried to find a fry without too much cheese, he knew what Lora was after, but they were all smothered. Her eyes watered, “that’s hot,” she said and left the room. The fridge creaked open. The sound of liquid filling a cup.
“Full of garbage!” Lora screamed at Staff, a lump on the bed when he prompted her to wake for day program. She told Staff he’s weird, pointed to his hair, told him he had something hanging there. Staff touched his bangs, “This?” but she meant his shoulder length hair. She told Staff he had a fluffy hair. Staff struggled to keep up with her oscillating moods.

Campitis Pizza owner grew up with Staff’s dad. Staff ordered a slice, “Your generation has it easy,” the owner said when Staff told him he wrote, “You can become Youtube famous,” and he served Staff a pithy slice.
“I’d love to know what people think when they stick a needle in their arm. People say it’s a
disease, but it’s not. Cancer’s a disease. Shooting up’s a behavior,” Evening Staff’s shoulders
lurched towards Staff, whose dad was released from prison yesterday. He didn’t tell her his
dad’s tethered to the needle, like her high school friend who just overdosed, or that Staff’s
familiar with not wanting to live, but not wanting to die either.

Rose watched the Golden Girls on her recliner, while Staff prepared pizza for lunch. Staff
assisted Rose in the bathroom. Feces were smeared down her leg and she didn’t want to
shower. Staff struggled to keep her under the water long enough to clean each loose fold of
skin.
Staff's dad transferred to Renewal Inc. Community Corrections after serving a shortened sentence at Western Penitentiary. He told Staff a few tales from his time there.

NIGHT OF THE STEELER-KANSAS CITY GAME
WAKE UP AT 4AM TO TAKE A SHIT AND ALL
THE STALLS ARE FULL THIS GUYS DUECED
OUT NAKED AND HUMPING THE FLOOR BARKING
LIKE A FUCKING DOG HE STARTED CREEPING
THE OTHER GUYS OUT SO THEY LOCKED HIM IN
A STALL THERE SMOKING THAT SYNTHETIC
MARIJUANA BECAUSE IT DONT SHOW UP
IN DRUG TESTS THAT SHITLL MAKE YOU RETARDED

SOME FUCKIN SCUMBAG MOTHER
FUCKER STOLE MY SHOELACES
I WENT INTO EVERY ONE OF THOSE
MOTHERFUCKERS ROOMS AND TOLD
THEM IF I CATCH ANY OF THEM STEALING
MY SHIT ILL KICK THERE FUCKIN ASS

SOME ASSHOLE SAYS HES PISSED HOT SIX
TIMES AND THEY DONT DO NOTHIN HE
SMUGGLED A BUNCH OF DOPE IN
NOW THERES PUKE ALL OVER THE BATHROOM
AND NO ONE SMOKES THAT DUECE ANYMORE
HES TRIED TO SELL ME THAT SHIT I TELL
HIM TO STAY THE HELL AWAY FROM ME

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When people are imprisoned they become packs of wolves & violence governs their world & their world reflects, is modeled after the world of the bodies with all the power.
Staff watched blue states turn red for the devil’s dick on CNN. At 3am Staff shut off the TV and sat in the dark living room. All consumers slept well through the night.
Staff waited for an interview for a position on the Community Treatment Team. He waited for 25 minutes in the facility’s waiting area. The View was on the TV. “$2,000 for a bag,” the man next to him scoffed at the Louis Viton. “Would you put on Channel 2? I want to watch The Price is Right,” a woman asked The Receptionist, who hesitated then said it was stuck on The View: a discussion about trans bathroom legislation, to which Whoopi Goldberg stated, “straight people are the ones you need to worry about.”
The Community Treatment Team is the highest level of outpatient care an individual with SMI can receive. The service is comprised of four multidisciplinary teams, including a physician, nurse, therapist, case manager, peer, and other professionals. Each team has a maximum case load of a hundred individuals. Each team meets in a conference room at the office from Monday through Friday at 8am for a meeting in which cases are assigned for the day. CTT, formerly Staff, transferred to Team 4 as a Floater, worked Thursday to Sunday, with doubles on both Saturday and Sunday. The priority service for floaters on weekend shifts was medication delivery and observation. On these double shifts, due to state regulations, CTT was assigned to do evening medication drops for Team 3.
CTT shadowed The Therapist, who briefed him on Markey. He’d just gotten arrested, again. During The Therapist’s group last week Markey pulled his penis out and jerked it, so she told him to take a walk because he was hurting every person in that room when he did that.

CTT shadowed The Nurse, who briefed him on Joe’s short bowel syndrome, cautioning that Joe will ask CTT for food because he overeats till he has no food or money, because overeating makes him drunk. CTT observed The Nurse administering Joe’s Haldol IM, and DM.

CTT shadowed The Therapist. At noon, he sat in on The Therapist’s group. Deb arrived late and missed introductions. “I know everyone in this room,” Deb reported then named each person. When she got to CTT, she realized she was wrong. He introduced himself. “Aida? I can’t tell, are you a man?” He restated his name in a deeper tone.
Gina swallowed her pills with water on the porch, then turned to CTT, “what do you know about Obama?” To avoid conflating therapy with politics, he feigned ignorance, to which Gina asked if he liked the devil’s dick. “He’s not a very nice man,” CTT said and left it at that.

CTT waited fifteen minutes for Bob to answer the doorbell. Bob swallowed his pills with a glug from a gallon of whole milk, and reported that his father used to beat him with a broomstick if he walked into the house with snow on his clothing. CTT reflected that the experience sounded painful, but Bob insisted it wasn’t, insisted it was love.

CTT PU Craig from the RTFA and linked him to a doctor appointment at the health center. While driving Craig back to the RTFA, Craig asked CTT to take him to the smoke shop that sells cigarillos for a dollar. CTT did not have time to link Craig to the smoke shop. Craig reported that his favorite bands were, Anal Cunt, Funeral Rape, and Dying Fetus. CTT gripped the wheel a little tighter. Craig laughed maniacally.
“I’ll get dressed and be out,” T told CTT through the cracked door, baseline behavior, so he returned to the car to wait for her with Drew. Seven minutes passed before she appeared through the back alley—slinking all skin and bones. Drew thought she looked terrible, like she’d been smoking crack all day and night. CTT linked them to PNC to cash their weekly spend checks. Drew scanned the radio stopped on Boyz in the Hood, cranked the volume, and rolled the windows down. “Now this is something I can get down to,” T livened from sleep to rhythm. CTT let them blast it.

CTT met Bobbi outside of Phillip Pelusi at 5pm. She got into CTT’s car and ran her fingers along his tricep. She wore sunglasses and had a bottle of water. Her friend stood on the sidewalk, calling CTT a cutie. He placed the roll of meds in Bobbi’s hand, but she continued caressing his skin. She placed the bag of pills in her purse and took a swig of water, “thanks dude…. I need to quit saying dude. Who says dude?” CTT didn’t show her his DUDE lip tattoo that’s since faded to nUDE.

CTT linked and accompanied Deb, Shelly, and Krista to the annual softball tournament at Mellon Park. When they first arrived, everyone huddled underneath tents to wait out the rain. Krista reported that she’s a great gynecologist for both men and women. “That’s great,” my supervisor encouraged, “because so many men need gynecologists.” For a moment CTT forgot he’s a man who has needed a gynecologist.
News of Chris Cornell’s passing had hit the media May 18. Drew played Black Hole Sun. While sitting in the car as T bought cigarettes, Drew told CTT, “you know he’s talking about the end of the world, right? The black hole sun is the thing that ends the world.” Drew then pointed to the woman standing in the cricket store, told CTT that right there was a man, said she’d been looking at him and that’s fucking disgusting. In the afternoon, during office hours, CTT used the men’s restroom. The toilet seat was left up triggering dysphoria.

After his shift CTT skated to his car. He noticed the individuals living in the shelter gather chairs in the parking lot to drink and be merry together. Two men walked up the street, one in front of the other, yelling back and forth about shooting all of the other. He ordered Dominos and slept in his ambulance behind DAS by the tracks.

During the morning meeting, CTT realized that he’s paid to talk about people, then studied his badge: I am your experience of care. His face blurred in the low resolution.
On his way into DAS, CTT noticed the windows were bolted shut from the outside, and provided Krista with a SV. He signed her out and they went on a mindfulness walk behind the facility on a trail near the river. Krista searched a bush for a Ziploc pack of Marlboro Reds. CTT engaged Krista in therapy as they sat on a rock. She lit a cigarette, said she couldn’t breathe inside, couldn’t open her windows, couldn’t get any fresh air. She asked CTT what he ate for lunch, what he’ll eat for dinner. She told him she’d fallen for many men who’d fucked other men. She lit another cigarette. Then another. And another.

Toni’s curtains were light pink. Transparent from the inside, but not the outside. CTT OM in the kitchen. Toni swallowed her pills and told CTT that she knew who he was, Rob’s friend, been sitting around on his ass all day. CTT assured she had it wrong, which agitated her further so he said goodbye.

The new luxury sky rise near CTT’s alma mater resembled a modern hell, its dim brick foundation obstructing the city skyline from the university. Dalton jumped from the 5th floor balcony on a Tuesday afternoon during finals week. Taught his peers the sound of a body falling five stories. They saw him like a slushie on the sidewalk. The S bent in UNIVERSITY and CTT wondered if his body bowed the sign as if something tried to catch him.
The Therapist told CTT that she’s the no lady. During the morning meeting CTT decided he would try being a no lady for the day. Throughout the day, he pondered the varying degrees to which we’re capable of setting boundaries.

When CTT arrived at the RTFA for a SV with Jen she asked if he’d brought her pack of cigarettes then asked if they could go outside for some fresh air. CTT signed Jen out and accompanied her on a mindfulness walk to the parking lot, where Jen asked if CTT could drive her to the post office because she needed to buy stamps. After establishing that the stamps were on Jen’s dime, CTT linked her to the post office. During office hours, CTT discussed the interaction with his colleagues and they informed him that Jen bought stamps to write letters of delusion to the FBI. They instructed CTT not to take Jen the post office again.

Drew told Staff when you open a knocking door and nobody’s there, you’re letting spirits in. After his shift ended, CTT opened a knocking door to nobody.
CTT’s Forensic Psychology Professor was also the Director of Mental Health at the jail CTT’s bipolar father was sporadically detained in. The Professor kept the 8am class awake by sharing jailhouse stories from her 25 years’ experience. She’s worked for the jail since detox best-practices mandated strapping a withdrawing inmate naked to a cot with a hole and bucket underneath. CTT never forgot the tale of the man who crafted a get-away-rope by knotting sheet to sheet until 8 stories long.

When CTT asked his father if he was incarcerated during the escape attempts, his father confirmed and said the truth was a CO pushed the inmate to his death.

“What the inmate didn’t take into account was that each pod was 2 stories and therefore double the pod number,” The Professor preened, “three months later, a second inmate, housed on the other side of the jail, attempted the same method of escape and too fell short, though survived with a fractured ankle and scraped face.” Correctional Officers watched him fall on security camera at 8:40 p.m. U.S. Deputy Marshal added state escape charges to his federal sentence. Warden Calvin Lightfoot stated successful escapes happen quickly.

Freedom was only felonies away, dangling he gripped the first knot & began his descent. His weight pulled the rope taut & the weight of a body tore on the jagged window. His cellmate gazed eyes glazed. His hope for escape now dropping with the weight of a body then splat before his eyes.

Darwinawards.com commemorates those who improve our gene pool by removing themselves from it. The 1997 Darwin Award was given to these two inmates. The Pittsburgh Post-Gazette published a memo to Allegheny County Jail Inmates containing the message: you’re a lot higher up than you think.
CTT’s dad dug through his clothing from before his two years at Western Penitentiary. He handed CTT a spoon and syringe. “I DON'T WANT TO SEE THAT. THOW IT AWAY,” his dad found them in a pair of jeans and handed CTT the jeans, “SIZE 30, WILL THEY FIT YOU. THERES NO WAY I CAN FIT IN THEM NOW.”

His heap of stamp bags and foil in the shredder dope on a spoon hidden above the medicine cabinet in the basement belt on the door dope, ready to cook shoot dope rolled opaque & callous between his fingertips

CTT flushed the narcotic so his grandmother wouldn’t have to see the way she had to see her son arrested in their home.

After driving him back to the half-way house, CTT pulled the Wranglers on and they fit tight around the waist, but baggy in the legs so he donated them to Goodwill.
A will won’t always or immediately die when deprived. It won’t shrivel in the lack of sunlight like a plant left dry in the dark. No. It propagates with the blowing wind. A will without either turns to hard up fine-tuned innovation or gets lost and forgotten.
CTT linked T to PNC to cash her weekly spend check, then to the Smoke Wizard. She reported that she wasn’t tricking for crack anymore, she was tricking for life. CTT engaged her in IDDT and HW.

CTT OM through Gina’s front door. She didn’t want to engage in therapy. Gina reported that she liked CTT’s jeans and asked him to turn around for her, also if he owned car. Explained that a man should own a car.

A man approached CTT in the parking lot, stretching his arm toward him, then opened his hand, revealing a crumpled napkin, “do you want this? It’s Winnifred toilet paper.” CTT had many consumers on his schedule. He told the man someone was waiting for him. “Africa!” the man fondled the napkin, wide eyed as if he’d found the answer to something important, “this is Winnifred toilet paper, where should I put it?” CTT pointed to the full garbage and advised he put it there. He wished he had time for that kind of world building.
ACRONYMS

ADL- activities of daily living

CLA- community living arrangement
CM- case management
CO- correctional officer
CTT- community treatment team

DAS- diversion and acute stabilization
DA- Defense Attorney
DM- deliver medications
DO- drop off

FMLA- Family Medical Leave of Absence

HIPAA- Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act
HW- health and wellness

ID- intellectual disabilities
IM- intramuscular injection
IDDT- integrated dual diagnosis treatment

LTRS- long term structured residence

MAR- Medication Administration Record
MH- mental health

OM- observe medications
OSHA- Occupational Safety and Health Administration

PU- pick up

RN- registered nurse
RTFA- residential treatment facility for adults

SMI- severe mental illness
SV- support visit

UTI- urinary tract infection