

First and Last Day Out of the Asylum
by Natalie McNabb

I sing along with Simon and Garfunkel's *Mrs. Robinson* while cutting across traffic to take a left in this Jeep someone left idling for me in front of that AM/PM. I pass DO NOT ENTER in flashing neon, in red letters on white-painted metal too, and as *Mrs. Robinson* fades, I buckle my seatbelt and stomp on the gas because there are people on this overcast Sunday freeway who must be shown how to live.

Before a new song even begins I crank up the stereo, and when Paul Simon plucks that first chord in *The Sound of Silence*—*D-minor*, so drawn and cold—I'm grateful to the owner of this Jeep for his taste in both vehicles and music. I croon on, stroke mockery with my tongue—*C-chord*—along with Paul and Art.

I enter the freeway and find myself hurtling toward two oncoming vehicles: a truck and a rusty minivan. I aim for the minivan, singing, staring it down. *You see, it's not envy, greed or pride that casts the ugliest curse upon man, not even lust or anger, but sloth, apathy born of world-weariness.* The driver of the minivan hasn't reacted, probably hasn't even seen me. *Like my last therapist who could neither see nor hear for having seen and heard so much.* The driver snaps out of his daze and zigzags off into the concrete median, his apathy lifted and sin as white as snow.

A sedan slows and veers, only slightly though, the driver perhaps assuming I'll turn away. I re-aim for their grill. As they peel away toward the ditch I find the driver's eyes, so alert and protective of the child in her back seat. My front fender swipes the rear panel, strips the bumper from her car. *Someone should've done that for you, Mother. We were to be neither*

seen—‘Stop it!’—nor heard—‘Shut up!’—, and you pressed us down—‘Sit still!’—and down to be sure of it. We either acquiesced or we rebel and were forced, and then sloth crept in upon us.

I croon on with Paul and Art.

Another of the imprisoned thousands, millions even, shows themselves in a sports car brandishing headlights and horn. I honk and flash back, singing louder as the driver and I throw gestures at one another out our windows. *But, perhaps there’s no sloth here.* Though we both brake and turn sharply, we choose the same direction and collide.

Everything lurches, and I’m jerked sideways. My chest is compressed, shudders as the Jeep pitches, tumbles and rocks upside-down, my hip, ribs and shoulder straining against the seatbelt as I sway back-and-forth, back-and-forth. And, yet, it seems as if everything has been turned right, as if I’m cradled now in some inverse world with pavement and road stripes above, the sky beneath, Simon and Garfunkel singing on and on. I sing *The Sounds of Silence* with them while something runs up my neck, trickles over my jaw, bathes my vision in red.

Sirens grow, drowning out the stereo as they approach. When the sirens are at last silent and only flashing red and white light remains, I know I’ll be pulled from here soon.

A female paramedic is unable to open the door at first, but manages. She yells over Simon and Garfunkle, over my own singing, “We’ll get you out! Where’s your pain, sir?”

I have to stop singing to tell her, “My chest.”

She can’t hear me over the stereo, reaches past and hits the knob to turn it off.

“Where’s your pain?”

“Chest.”

She has a male paramedic help her brace me against the seat to keep me from dropping to the roof when she undoes my seatbelt. I wipe at the blood on my face as they untangle me from the belt, pull me out and put me on a gurney. She covers me in a blanket, wraps the fabric about my feet, tucks it over my shoulders. She asks, "What's your name, sir?"

"Ehyeh."

"Sir?"

"Ehyeh. It means *I Am.*"

"It means you're what, sir?"

I shake my head. "Ehyeh means *I Am.*"

She looks at me for a bit. "Is it your first or last name, sir?"

"First." I add, "And last." *She won't understand; she's asleep like the others.*

"You're in shock, I think, sir," she says.

The male paramedic tells me, "Sit tight," and turns, whispers to her, "More to this one's story I'll bet."

I see how she won't look at me anymore. *I might save her though.* My hand shoots out from under the blanket, grabs her wrist. "Wake up. Please wake up," I say, but can't hold on and must let her go.

The male paramedic places two fingers on my wrist.

I tell him, "It means *I Am.*"

He says, "Yes, okay," and tells me, "Sit tight," again, but both of their faces are pulling away.

The sky is lifting too, and I whisper, "*I Am*," and whisper again, "*I Am*," but they have drawn the blanket up, have covered my face before I have even begun to tell them about this sky that's shot with silver blooming and blooming into the brightest whites, before I have begun to sing to them of the whispers here that upend all apathy and silence.

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