

Botching Something Big Big Big

By J. A. Tyler

The younger one was missing the lower half of her jaw. So now most of what she said to herself came out as moans and whimpering. And the older one was twitching and twitching and twitching. The older one had gone first but wasn't gone even then. Both now were half-hearted attempts at death staining an otherwise pristine expanse of white carpet.

One day after another they said good morning and good morning and watered their own greening plants on their own rectangle patios at the back of their identically designed condos. And one day after another they flailed and grimaced underneath smiles that were pretend and soiled.

The older one knitted and slept and imagined that her life was the life of soap operas that carved at her ear when she closed her eyes. And the younger one quilted and watched baseball games that she thought were futuristic political debates. Mitts and gloves for boxing. And together the older and the younger went from dominoes to cards to building forts out of the orange bodies of empty pill bottles. Because they could always refill and refill and refill.

Spring to summer to fall to winter and then it went again. And for these women old and older it had gone again again again. It was a repeat and a reduction. It was deglazing a pan into the disposal instead of onto a plate. It was burning life and craning necks and expanding knuckles. It was a nothing existence. It was pill popping them on and on and on.

The older one had a line once on a man who was still eating solid foods and writing his own checks. But he died. And the younger one had a bead once on another man who remembered the tango and had a turquoise suit. But he died too. And so did him and him and him. Another and another. This one died and that one died and the older one went on knitting and the younger one went on quilting and the seasons spun like a drying driving cycle.

Until one day when it was good morning and good morning and the watering of plants and the sighs in morning air and the younger one said to the older one do you want to kill yourself. And the older one paused and looked at how crimped her hands were becoming and said yes. And the younger one said huh. And the older one said yes.

Ten days was the wait for the gun and two weeks was how long it took them to figure out the loading and cocking and aiming and firing. And it was another week with updates to their final papers and shaky signatures and families who said I love you I love you I love you. And yes they could go through the photo albums again. And yes she would make her casserole for them again. And no they didn't have to stay at a motel or a hotel because she had room for them all. But they drove away eventually taking another winter with them. And the knitting and the quilting were piling up. And the forts were becoming castles and the castles were orange and lovely and begging.

It was out of respect for an older generation that the younger one promised to help. She would help first and then take care of herself. She would load and cock and

aim and fire and then do it again with probably hands either sweating or at ease. She didn't know what would happen. It was a guess. And the older woman thought that sounded best anyway. And they smiled old woman smiles to one another's old woman faces. And the air was scented like spring again. And it was moving into summer again. And if it wasn't now then it would never be. So they had to and soon. Before the cycles cycled again again again.

And the first shot had seemed good and right. She hadn't remembered the recoil being that bad but she was old and always learning new things. And the older one had fallen and bled and seemed quiet and sleeping. And so she had reloaded and cocked and aimed and went for it. But a breeze or a thought or a pulse of her old woman blood had jilted her hand a millimeter off the mark. So instead of losing a head and a brain she'd only lost the lower half of her jaw.

And now her words that were something like *help me o god o god o god* just sounded like whimpers and moaning. And she was hunched over the kitchen table either puking or bleeding or both. And that's when the other one older in her dying started to twitch and twitch and twitch. She wasn't supposed to move. She wasn't supposed to live. She was supposed to die. And now they were both living slowly and wounded. Moving like idle flames instead of beacons. Using a gun like a toothpick instead of an axe. Wielding their lives like stickers peeling from bumpers instead of emblems shining and emblazoned on the grand drape of something big big big.

J. A. Tyler has recent work in Elimae, Lamination Colony, Night Train, Underground Voices, Prick of the Spindle, & Word Riot. His chapbook The Girl in the Black Sweater is available now from Trainwreck Press and his debut novella Someone, Somewhere is forthcoming from Ghost Road Press in 2009. He is also founding editor of Mud Luscious, a reviewer for Rural Messengers Press, a member of the Pindeldyboz editorial team, and an editorial intern for Dzanc books. Read more at www.aboutjatyler.com or www.aboutjatyler.blogspot.com.