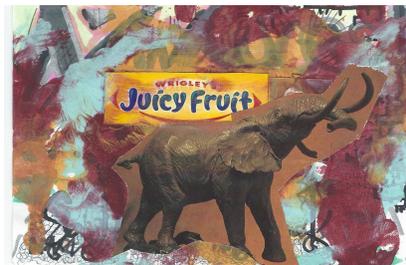


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(<http://j4work.wordpress.com>)

"Juicy Fruit" / j4

story | 3.1.17

Absolution

by Kris Faatz | artwork by j4

The Sunday after Granna died, Jacey went to church and stood up with the choir. She didn't wear her white bride-of-innocence robe like everyone else, or tie her hair back in a regulation ponytail. The congregation sat stiff and drab, rows of good wool suits kept fresh in mothballs, fussy flowered skirts with elastic waists. Jacey faced them down in jeans and her favorite T-shirt: skin tight, lime green, and around her breasts, the outline of a martini glass with two olives in

sinkhole it, one for each nipple. Her red hair frothed
down her back and fizzed over her
shoulders.

Granna wouldn't have a service here. The people in the pews wouldn't line up to look into the casket, cross themselves, and touch the old lady's waxy wrinkled fingers. They wouldn't give Jacey hugs flavored with freesia perfume or Old Spice aftershave, and they wouldn't whisper syrupy sympathy about how hard it must be, all her family gone when she was still so young. They wouldn't troop outside to watch the casket lowered into the cemetery plot Granna and Gramps had bought years before Jacey was born.

The church said you had to wait for God's will. Pain didn't matter. The church said anybody who dared to take her life into her own hands would go into the everlasting fire. Granna had told Jacey to tell the truth anyway, right before her steady old fingers counted too many sleeping pills out of the bottle.

The pale faces blurred in the pews, but Jacey didn't rub her stinging eyes. The needle-jabs of all the stares pricked at her bare arms. The old priest's glare tried to wind like a rope around her throat and chest.

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*How dare you come here like this, after
what you did? How dare you stand there
and look like yourself?*

They wanted to rub—slice—her out of the dim incense-smelling room. Out of the picture of the choir in their pure, clean, matching robes; out of the sight of the sad-faced, bloody-browed Jesus on the cross. They wanted her gone from the dusty pew where Granna had brought her every Sunday since before Jacey could walk. They didn't want Jacey inside this house of God, the same way they didn't want Granna outside in the plot she and Gramps had bought all those years ago, where she had planned to lie in the smooth cold earth next to her husband.

But they hadn't been there, the choir or the priest or any of the mothball-smelling suits or fussy skirts. They hadn't sat by Granna's bed and watched the hand-crocheted blanket squares jerking up and down as Granna breathed. They hadn't heard her whisper how it felt like somebody had stuck a hot poker inside her ribs and was scraping it around. They hadn't watched all her laughter shrivel up and blow away. (They remembered her laugh, didn't they? Jacey would never forget it. It had been her sunshine every day she could remember.)

sinkhole And they hadn't been there the last night,
either, when Jacey held up the water for
Granna to sip and wash the sleeping pills
down, and Granna's eyes closed, and the
jerky up-and-down smoothed out slowly, so
slowly, and then, so gently, stopped.

No more hot poker. No cold earth and
heavy gravestone. No everlasting fire. Only
the fire Jacey had promised: the one that
turned Granna's body into ash.

Now, one last time, Jacey looked out at the
pew where she and Granna had sat every
Sunday, fingering rosary beads. The two of
them had prayed together, the way they did
everything else. One last time, Jacey faced all
the staring eyes down.

Here I am. See it.

Granna would be scattered on the wind.
Jacey had promised her that. Today two
women would go out into the world
together. In Jacey's head, she heard her
Granna's laughter.

Kris Faatz (rhymes with skates) is
a pianist and teacher. Her short
fiction has appeared or is

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j4 is a collective of four persons, all given names beginning with j, who are compelled to explore transindividual composition. Their work can be found at j4work.wordpress.com (<http://j4work.wordpress.com/>) and j4work.tumblr.com (<http://j4work.tumblr.com/>).

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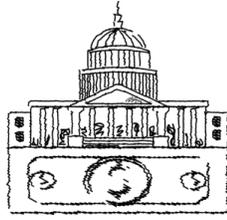
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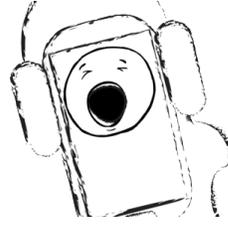
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here at
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we're
explorers, not
explainers –
our goal is to
chart the
world's
complexities,
to resist the
echo
chamber, and
to engage in
the difficult
work of
empathy.

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