

Hello, My NAME Is MARLEY
noun name

And I'm an ALCOHOLIC.
noun

My parents, they had flaws. I was the kid left waiting at school, watching all the other kids' parents pick them up on time while I got BLISTERS from squeezing the chain-link fence so hard, only to become someone else's RESPONSIBILITY because Mom forgot me, again.
noun (plural)

Dad hoarded word search puzzles and hated DOCTORS. Refused to make any kind of appointment, pediatrician to primary, and I thought that was fine.
occupation (plural)

Until I turned twenty-four.

This is what I know: My family at the KITCHEN table, Mom with her BOURBON, me sipping Sprite, when Dad stops talking mid-JOKE. Mom calls his NAME and I'm snapping my fingers in front of his face like a HYPNOTIST but instead of Dad clucking or barking or singing some opera song we didn't even know he knew, he collapses.
room in a house
drink noun occupation

The DOCTOR tells us Dad had a STROKE which makes Mom clasp the collar
occupation noun
 of her tear-dampened blouse, her knees bending like my BALLERINA
occupation
BARBIE's after I'd make her kneel in the aftermath of her DECAPITATION.
noun noun

I remember Mom in my arms, me struggling to hold her up and wondering if she was always this heavy. She emits a noise that I feel ERUPTING from her
verb (ending in -ing)
 chest where her HEART should be PULSING and I wonder whether that
organ verb (ending in -ing)
 sound is what's choking me or if I'm holding my breath to save whatever oxygen might be leftover when she's done.

Dad becomes tubes and wires that monitor his heart rate, and fluids that collect into a pouch beside his left leg. I go home to gather his unfinished puzzle books. I stand in the kitchen, still thinking about the three of us at the table, Mom with her BOURBON, wondering if she'll finish it before or after
drink
 Dad delivers the PUNCHLINE.
noun

Two MONTHS in the HOSPITAL and Mom has me buy Dad new puzzle books.
unit of time a place
 At some point, I start noticing how Mom talks to him, traces the outline of his FACE and tells him I'll be right back with his puzzles, forgetting I'm sitting
noun
 right there in a room decorated by me with pictures and blankets and my Dad's favorite PILLOWS, all smelling like CHEETOS, but none of that
noun (plural) snack
 matters.

So I leave.

Every day, I go to the bookstore to get more puzzle books. Another MONTH
unit of time
goes by and I'm searching for words tangled in the whispers of distracted
DOCTORS
occupation (plural) and nurses outside Dad's door: *decreased appetite, changing
vitals, and incoherent*. They scatter without looking at me, eye contact
stopping when Dad can no longer lift his right arm, when he becomes a STICK
noun
figure on a HOSPITAL
a place bed and Mom his personalized CARDBOARD
noun cutout.
Eventually, I start browsing the shelves of the bookstore in hopes of a new
distraction until I find a book of Mad Libs.

I fill in the blanks with words from my word bank, and read these
combinations out loud and Mom shakes Dad and tells me he wants to hear
another. So, of course, I keep going because Mom is SMILING
verb (ending in -ing) again and Dad
isn't a SHRIVELING
verb (ending in -ing) body in a place he spent DECADES
unit of time avoiding.

On one of Dad's better days, when he sleeps without drooling and staring at
nothing while Mom spends hours trying to coax him back to her, I go HOME. I
a place
leave them there because I need a SHOWER
noun without a help button and with
the promise of privacy. I am only gone an HOUR
unit of time at most but, when I return to
the HOSPITAL,
a place a nurse tries to stop me in the hallway. She's apologizing and I
hear Dad's NAME
noun in her rehearsed apologies and I feel my body tense,

preparing to cry over the loss of him. Then she's apologizing again, but talking about Mom and I don't understand—

Until I do.

Because there's Mom beside Dad, holding his HAND, her FOREHEAD on his
part of the body part of the body
BED. I don't know why, but I walk over and say her NAME. Grip her shoulder
piece of furniture noun
and try to shake her awake because, even though I'm screaming her NAME,
noun
even though the nurse is trying to pull me away, and even though Mom's eyes
are wide open, PUPILS swollen, MOUTH dangling, my MIND is telling me she
part of the body (plural) part of the body noun
is still here, with me.

That she wouldn't leave me again.

I left her to take a shower but I promised I would be back and I wasn't gone
that long and maybe, in that time, she only fell asleep, so I dig my NAILS hard
part of the body (plural)
enough into the cloth of her shirt, call her NAME until my VOICE can no
noun noun
longer find its way up my THROAT, because Mom has to come back for me.
part of the body
But when I realize this, I'm standing in the HALLWAY watching the nurses
a place
pry my parents' HANDS apart.
part of the body (plural)

And now I'm no one else's RESPONSIBILITY.
noun

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I had them CREMATED together because I think they would've liked that. I
verb (past tense)
 burned some of Dad's puzzles with them, their ashes in a Ziploc bag I put in
 my glove compartment next to my flask. On the way HOME, I took a sip at
a place
 every red light.

And I drank the rest while cleaning out the house.

X X X

My days are the same. I wake up and place a bottle of BOURBON where
drink
 Mom's glass sat. I sit where I sat while Dad told his JOKES and I list all the
noun (plural)
PUNCHLINES I can think of. Every time I LAUGH, I DRINK and every time I
noun (plural) verb verb
 don't, I DRINK. One bottle turns into another until I'm waking up on the
verb
KITCHEN floor surrounded by word clippings taped to the walls, forming
a place
 stories that keep me LAUGHING and then one YEAR turns to three. Keep me
verb (ending in -ing) unit of time
LAUGHING until I realize I'm HUNGOVER until I VOMIT until I'm SOBER
verb (ending in -ing) state of being verb state of being
 enough to do it all over again.

Until, one day, those clippings on the wall read *what are you doing?* in Dad's

HANDWRITING.
noun

And, I don't know. I guess, in coming here TODAY, you could tell me?
unit of time