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## Rerouted

Megan Collom

*Cedarville University*, [megancollom@cedarville.edu](mailto:megancollom@cedarville.edu)

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# REROUTED

*Megan Collom*

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She's waiting by the crosswalk. Waving at me, she raises her arm as her dress lifts a couple inches higher. I tug at the steering wheel, driving Bonnie up to the curb. She looks good in black. The dress hugs her sides and dips at the neck, making room for antiquated pearls to rest on her protruding collar bones. Her hair-sprayed curls seem to reflect the billboard glow. I watch her hobble towards us. Her black heels look too big, like her feet are sliding in and out of them with each step. The door opens. She shuffles her things into the seat beside her and gathers her hair in front of her shoulders. I roll down the window to toss my cigarette.

"Pelham Funeral Home please." She etches a smile onto her face. I catch her eyes in my rearview mirror. They're green, maybe blue. Her eyelashes are coated with mascara. She blinks her striking eyes away, gluing them to her phone. I watch her buckle her seatbelt, waiting to put Bonnie in reverse, *wouldn't want to risk anything right?* The click of the clasp is my cue to click on my blinker. We drive.

*Head South towards Perkins Drive*

"So who died?" I ask. She's quiet, looking at that damn phone again. *She'll look up.* "Hmph," I cough, "Who died?" Her eyes flutter open, meeting

mine in the rearview mirror. I move the mirror downwards, I want to see her whole face. Her eyes trace the mirror's movement.

"Uhm—my Granny Patrice," her voice shakes, she must be trying not to cry.

"She old?"

"She was 64?"

"Oh, so she was sick,"

"I'd rather—"

"No no no, you can tell me." *Poor girl.* The clasp of her necklace is showing, falling down her neck like a minute hand that has just passed four o'clock. She moves it back into place, threading the chain through her fingers until the clasp is seated behind her back. I wait for her attention to return. She's quiet.

"Well?"

"She had Huntington's," she snaps. I feel the thud of her words.

"Genetic, ain't it?"

“I’d rather not think about this right now.”

“That’s one of them diseases without a cure right?”

Her glare echoes her words, I understand. I turn my eyes towards the road instead of the mirror, I figure she’d like some privacy. There’s a red light up ahead.

The red light glows above us in the New York sun. It buys me a second of time to glance behind me. Her phone has a wallet stuck to the case, her driver’s license sticks out from the third card slot. The left hand corner reads Kansas. MART is all I can decipher of her name. It’s a sweet nickname, *she’ll like that*.

I lunge over the middle console, keeping my right foot firmly on the brake. Bonnie rocks as I reach for my glovebox. Mart clutches the handle above her.

The latch pops open. I sift through the crumpled road maps and past insurance slips until my hand lands on a red plastic CD case. The light turns green—I open the CD case. My handwriting is scribbled across the silver disk: *United Methodist Church Hymn Collection*. I’m a bit of a church-goer.

I slip the CD into the disc slot to dispel the static of Bonnie’s breaking stereo. Clicking through the tracks, I create a metronome for the honking cars behind me. Mart kicks my seat just enough to break me out of my haze. I release the brake, speeding up to catch the cab in front of me.

*Continue onto Peace Bridge*

“Amazing Grace” has been playing for the last fifteen minutes—the CD must’ve gotten scratched. Mart seems to like it though. She’s been sniffing to herself for around ten of the fifteen minutes.

Bonnie hurries across the interstate held up by the green iron of Peace Bridge. Mart looks out the window, mumbling the lyrics to Bishop Kenny’s version of “Amazing Grace.”

“You religious?” I ask her. She stiffens, sitting up straight before she answers.

“I guess so,” she says.

“You guess so?”

“I mean I grew up Catholic—”

“Did Granny?”

“Sorry?”

“You know, Granny Patrice?”

“I’m not sure, I mean we were never that close—”

“I suppose that’s good. Should make it easier for ya if she ended up in Hell.”

The car goes cold, the only sound left cars whizzing past us. Mart shoots me a nasty look, I feel it creeping down my throat. *Damnit, Shawn*. I hit the center of the steering wheel. It lets out a gasp of squeaking air—my horn broke a couple of months

ago—Mart flinches. *Don't worry Mart, I'm not angry at you. No, no. Just the traffic, it's just the traffic.* My hand is still clenched in a fist above the Ford emblem. I stretch out my fingers, my hand shaking as it hovers. *Breathe, Shawn.* I rest my hand so it's parallel with the left one. It still shakes. I ignore it. *Maybe I'm just cold, it's gotta be cold in here.* I find the climate knob with my twitching right hand and spin it as far into the red as I can. The fans kick on and exhale loudly. So do I.

"I—I'm sorry, I didn't mean it that way I—I"

"Do not speak to me."

"No, no, no listen Mart."

"Who the hell is Mart?"

"That, that's your name—isn't it?" Mart shudders.

"I said do not speak to me." Her voice bites.

"Honey, I'm sure we can work this out. Listen to me, I'm sorry, I—" I ramble on.

"Pull over."

"Mart listen to me," I plead.

"Now." She grabs the door handle, trying to bust it open. She grunts, slamming her hand against the wall.

"The car is moving, the door won't open."

"Then stop the car."

"No." *You're never going to make the funeral from here Mart, we're still 15 miles out. Just calm down Mart, we're gonna make it.*

I glance back at the rearview mirror. She heaves, sinking back into her seat defeated. Mart scrunches the sleeves of her dress so they rest on her forearms. She clutches her phone, acrylic nails beating against the screen. They are percussive. Tapping. Constant. I feel her reach her head around my seat, peering at the GPS signal. *Only 20 more minutes Mart, you're okay. You can cry for Patrice later, you're okay.*

*Continue onto Townline Tunnel Road*

My hands slip off the steering wheel. I wipe them on my pant leg. I put them back at ten and two. Mart's hand moves towards the window button, she's so dainty, so graceful. *No, no Mart, you'll mess up your hair.*

I lock the window.

*Turn Right on to Canal Bank Street*

Droplets fall from my forehead like straggling drips of fuel from a leaking gas pump.

"Can you turn down the heater please," quivers Mart. *All you had to do was ask, Mart, I was doing all this for you.*

"Sure, sure sure." I nudge the knob to the left. The heat begins to disperse, the air thins as the cold slices through. Mart sighs. She's quiet again.

*In 400 Feet Turn Left onto Ontario Road*

“Actually, can you drop me off here?” Mart says. She’s chipper, her kind eyes seem to have returned. She points to the row of shops to our left.

“It’s really no trouble, we only have ten minutes until we’re there.” She raises her phone to her ear. *She’s not even listening to me.*

“No. You will drop me off on the corner. There’s a flower shop I need to stop at—” *There it is. That voice again. That voice won’t get you nowhere Mart.*

“How will you get to the service then—I’ll just take you there.”

“No, you will not.” *I will. You can’t just miss the service Mart.* She screams at me. It’s incoherent.

I reckon it’s best I turn left, and drive down the row of shops.

*Make a U-Turn and Return to Ontario Road*

I hate parallel parking. But Mart wants to visit this flower shop, so I’ll do it. There’s an opening between a red pickup—*Who drives a pickup in the city?*—and a police car. It’s tight, but I can do it. I focus my eyes on the trunk of the pickup. *A Chiefs fan.* I pull forward until my side door aligns with his. I shift the car into reverse, squeezing it into the spot, keeping a close eye on the fender of the cop car. Bonnie makes a screeching sound as I brake. I park.

“Hold on, let me get that door for you.” I say, hopping out of the car. She grunts, unbuckling

her seatbelt slowly. I watch her scoot towards the passenger side door rather than the one in front of me. *Oh! You’re right Mart, I should have known you wouldn’t want to step out into the road.*

I scramble towards the passenger side. My shoe unties—no bother—I grab the door handle.

I pull on the handle.

It’s stuck.

I try again.

It’s locked?

*Make a U-Turn and Return to Ontario Road*

Mart and I lock eyes through my tinted backseat window. She’s on the phone still. She’s talking quietly but I can hear muffled words.

“I’m outside... yes... scared...” *Mart don’t be scared, it’s because you locked yourself in dear. Silly girl, just open the door, I’ve got you.* “I’m locked in.. no no... he’s not in here”

I tug on the handle again. Mart screams.

“No, no no. Listen to me,” I say. I’m calm. She knows that. “All you have to do is unlock the door.” I place my face on the glass so I can be close to hers. I take my hand to the glass and point down. She shrieks.

“Mart look at me,” She shakes her head, tears starting to glide down her powdered face.

“Look at me, look at me,”

“No.” She yells. Her voice breaks, please don’t sob, please.

“Just unlock the door, you’re going to be okay—”

“No!” *She’s doing this again. Don’t make me—I don’t want to. Breathe.* My hand is shaking again, it feels numb. *My hand is numb, why is my hand numb?*

I plunge my shaking hand into my pocket. I just need a smoke, then I can relax.

### *Make a U-Turn and Return to Ontario Road*

A hand presses into my back. I’m pinned against Bonnie’s door. Turning my head, I catch a glimpse of the man behind me, before he pushes my head into the window. He’s saying something, his voice is bellowing, but my eyes are searching for Mart’s.

Mart has scooted herself back into the seat behind mine. She grips her purse close to her. The running mascara connects her eyes to her lips.

A man runs past me, moving through the space between Bonnie and the truck. He’s dressed in a black suit, his jacket drapes over his shoulders. His hair is graying, but he’s large.

I watch him through the tinted window. Holding the phone to his ear, he looks at Mart and nods his head. The lock snaps and I feel the car convulse. He opens her door, draping the jacket around her, and she falls into his arms. She weeps

on his white shirt, her mascara blotting in his chest. *I wonder if he was as close to Granny Patrice as Mart was, he’s stoic in comparison to her.*

Mart doesn’t look at me as the man helps her into the truck. She balances her stiletto on the step bar, and hoists herself in. I want to tell her everything is going to be alright. I’m sure Patrice is happy now.

I shift my hand in an attempt to find the second cigarette I feel poking out of my pant pocket, but my hand is met with the firm grip of the man behind me. He puts my wrists together behind my back; my incessant movements are ceased by metal handcuffs.

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It’s odd to be a passenger, but the man said I would have Bonnie back in no time. I missed looking out the window and ignoring the traffic signs.

There’s a cab in front of us. He’s well behaved, signaling his right hand turn before entering the parking lot of Pelham Funeral Home. He parks behind the red pickup, letting his three passengers escape. I catch a quick glimpse of Mart before she’s blurred by the roadside trees.

I pray for her, her smile carved into my memory, *bright shining as the sun.*