

Wilderness House Literary Review 4/3

Rachel Yoder
Fun In Recovery

Murder Bowl

We painted bowls. They called it Fun In Recovery, and we all had to participate. This was supposed to make us not want to stick needles in our arms. At Girl Talk Pottery Studio, we sat at long tables with bottles of paint and cups of foggy water.

"Maybe you can huff the paint!" Crazy Laura said, holding a brush up to her nose. We laughed, and Cheryl, the art therapist, glared. "Ha ha, Cheryl," Crazy Laura said, poking her bowl. She had blue paint on the tip of her nose. "Just kidding."

May from Newport Beach chewed her nails and cried because the song playing on the stereo triggered her and reminded her of her psycho ex-boyfriend who had held her hostage in a hotel room. He was some sort of Olympic gymnast and completely nutso.

"I still love him," she said.

"Paint into that feeling," Cheryl suggested. I gave May my gagging look, and she smiled a little.

Before rehab, I had lived in Chicago with these three Mexican sisters. I worked at Costco, and shot heroin, and felt superior to the crackheads next door. Right before I came to Arizona, I was living in this minivan with this guy named Don. That wasn't so great.

I didn't want to paint a stupid bowl so I just wrote MURDER in the bottom. Cheryl frowned when she saw it, then raised her eyebrows at me.

"I am expressing my feelings," I said, making sure each letter was thick and black. "My parents are paying two hundred dollars a day for me to paint this motherfucking bowl."

I wanted Cheryl to do something. All she said, though, was, "Language."

"It's just a little girl talk," I said under my breath as I perfected my paint job. This made Crazy Laura laugh and accidentally fart, after which she got embarrassed, after which she stopped talking entirely for three whole hours.

That night, I couldn't sleep. I smoked cigarettes on the porch, then got my MURDER bowl and walked out into the dark street. The rehab place was in the bad part of town, the barrio, with tweaker Mexicans packed fourteen deep in the brown and white trailer down the block. I tossed the bowl underhand, as high as I could. It twirled as it fell, then shattered on the street. Some scroungy dog barked, and I wondered if any of the tweakers had heard it break.

Back inside, Crazy Laura was big and fat on the couch, watching music videos.

"This place makes me crazy," I said, sitting beside her.

She shoved some Fritos in her mouth and looked at me.

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"Did you just break something?" she wanted to know. "What did you just break?"

I felt tired then. I rubbed my face with both hands. I said a bowl.

Waffles

Adam punched TeeRex in the face in the parking lot of the bowling alley. They were standing in this circle of light, chests puffed out like they were each having a cardiac arrest, and the rest of us were all standing around smoking and waiting for something to happen. Jenny Leech was being all 12-step, saying you guys, you guys, this isn't a spiritual solution, until Jimmy was like put a fucking cork in it and then Jenny flipped him off and sulked. Meanwhile, TeeRex was chanting What, Do something, What, Do something. Adam squinted and considered it.

Adam was some sort of Eskimo, brown skin and little black eyes and all the way from Alaska. Arizona pissed him off. It wasn't a good idea to tell him to do something. He stepped toward TeeRex and then laid his fist in his face with all the power of his dog-sledding shoulder behind it. That's when TeeRex started windmilling his short little arms and screaming You stupid Eskimo! We were all surprised that he was still upright, then Adam punched him again with his other fist and TeeRex fell and hit the cement like a bag of cut-off heads. All the guys were all over both of them then, break it up and whatnot, acting like they didn't want to see what had just happened. TeeRex was bleeding out his eye, lying on the ground, laughing. Adam said that he was going to stomp on his face with his work boot, and I believed him. Guys, holding him back, being admirable and such. Girls, touching their purses, saying how fucked up it all was. Missy was at the edge of it all, and it was all her fault. Jimmy pulled TeeRex up and said to him tough paper route, man.

Before the fight, we'd been inside at Rock-N-Bowl, the deal with black lights and smoke machines and loud top 40 music. The guys were throwing the bowling balls as hard as they could, and the girls were pretending they cared. Missy had this hair that was bleached blonde and looked like pipe cleaners that had been spooled around a pencil. TeeRex was all talking to her, and she was talking to him, and they were laughing, and Adam was acting like he didn't notice until TeeRex started typing Missy's number in his cell phone and then Adam approached them both with a bowling ball in his hand and slammed it down on the table where they were sitting and cracked the top right down the center. Missy was with Adam. Everyone knew that.

And before that we'd all been at the Saturday night speaker meeting at Salvation Army, and this girl off the Res told her story. It started off boring and she was talking about how she didn't even drink until she was 30 or something, and we were like what's the point, lady? Get to the good part. She seemed a little slow, and we were like *why is she even up there* until she got to the part where her ex-husband shot her in the face. She pointed to a little scar on her cheek and everyone stopped breathing. After she got shot in the head is when she started drinking is what she said. We all felt really dumb then because, seriously.

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Before that it had been some bullshit at Starbucks, Marlboro Reds from here to eternity, the guy with a hairy back and a lazy eye in the apartment complex pool telling us stories about New York City. And before that it'd been breakfast, the place on Montezuma Street that had waffles with ice cream and waitresses old enough to be our moms.

"Sweeties," the blonde one who smelled like roll-on deodorant and bacon said, touching each of our shoulders. "What's it gonna be?" Even after we placed our orders, we wanted for her to come back. We waited for her to return to us, to ask, "Sweeties, my little sweeties. Tell me what it is you need."

Happy Halloween

In the JC Penney's dressing room, Mega and I danced in front of the three-way mirrors in our pastel unitards.

I said, "You're being such a unitard!" and poked at my knee fat while we laughed.

She said, looking at her butt, "Seriously, I'm leaving the tags on and returning this thing."

Later, at the AA Halloween Dance, we worked out. Creepy old guys kept wanting to dance with me.

"I'm exercising!" I said, appalled. I took a seat and tightened my velcro shoe tabs. I adjusted the scrunchie in my side ponytail. I sang along to the *Journey* song in my invisible microphone. I asked the cute kid beside me what he was supposed to be.

"I just got off work," he said. He was wearing a shirt and some jeans.

"So maybe you're dressed as a guy who just got off work," I said.

"Yeah, maybe," he said.

"Do you want to exercise!?" I asked. He said no, he didn't want to exercise.

Back on the dance floor, I asked Mega, "Do you want to check your pulse and walk it out?" She put two fingers on her jugular and consulted her invisible watch. We marched in place.

"Let's stretch!" I said, stretching.

"Let's take a lap!" I said, and ran past the DJ.

Even 80s aerobics instructors have to pee, and so I did. In the bathroom, my Subtle Shaper support hosiery were being impossible; they nearly strangled me. There was this girl in there with a cape, carpenter suspenders, tights, high heels, and underpants worn on the outside. I had no idea who she was supposed to be.

After I peed, this old guy dressed as a doctor said, "I used to go to Lyzard's and all the drunk girls let me stick this in between their boobs." He waggled his stethoscope at me. "You girls won't let me do that anymore."

"Time to jog," I said, and ran away.

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Marilyn Monroe, my sponsor, slow danced with JFK Jr., her husband. During the fast songs, we all exercised together. She did jumping jacks in her blue silk dress.

For the costume contest, we lined up in pairs. There was this devil and angel, and the angel was missing a bunch of teeth, except that wasn't part of her costume. There was the creepy doctor and his nurse. There were some other people, whatever. Then there was me and Mega. We ran in place when they called our names. The crowd cheered. We won the AA Costume Contest. Someone gave me a t-shirt.

Rachel Yoder has written for the New York Times, The Sun Magazine, Opium Magazine, Quick Fiction, PANK, and other publications. Her writing is forthcoming in Kenyon Review Online. She is an Iowa Arts Fellow in the Nonfiction Writing Program at the University of Iowa.