My wife, Shannon was working from home in her downstairs office while frustration tormented my nerves in the living room. The hardwood floor was littered with wooden toy trains, building blocks, and action figures. Tiny giggles and screams fused with writer’s block guaranteed that my writing process would result in defeat. My three-year old son Arthur was practicing karate moves in the middle of the room, kicking toys while yelling, “Hi-yah”. My two-year son Simon stood on the top of the couch adjacent from me. He screamed while hanging from the curtains, lifting his legs and flopping his bottom on the couch.

 “Simon! What are you doing? I told you no curtains!”, I hollered.

Two holes above the window on the brown painted wall behind me revealed where a curtain rod once hung.

“What’s all the noise up here”, Shannon asked as she walked up the stairs. Her blonde was hair pulled back in a ponytail. She pulled a tissue from the pocket of her blue robe and blew her nose.

“I’m sick of replacing these freaking curtain rod brackets. It’s ridiculous”, I exclaimed.

“He’s bored and you are on your computer, ignoring him”, Shannon said.

“I gotta get this done for school. What do you want me to do”, I asked.

“I don’t know, but I have to work and I can’t have the kids screaming when I’m on the phone with providers. I can’t concentrate”, She said.

“I can’t either”, I exclaimed, “I’m walking to the Wawa for a coffee.”

“Grab me one,” She said, “don’t put any cream or sugar in it. It was too sweet last time.”

“Ok”, I said as the door slammed behind me.

The naked trees and rooftops in the forefront of a cold gray sky implied the transition from autumn to winter, as the sidewalk moved below my feet like a conveyor belt. I went on autopilot.

As I walked through the lot I saw a girl, sitting on the ground with her back against the wall, wearing a black hat and an apron. A cigarette hung from her lips as she played with her phone. A tall black man held the door for me as I entered the store.

While filling the cups I felt a cold hand on my shoulder. “Excuse me dear”, She said. Her eyes were as blue as shadows casted on snow. She headed towards the register. I poured sugar and cream in one cup, left the other black, and followed behind her. The cashier put a quart of milk and two bananas in a bag.

“Can you bag the bananas separately”, the old woman asked. “I don’t want the milk to freeze them. I like them to freeze in my tummy.”

 The cashier smirked and responded, “sure.” Her hair was pulled back in dreadlocks and she wore librarian style glasses. She looked at me with a raised eyebrow.

“I would have assumed that you didn’t want the bananas to get squashed”, I said.

“I usually buy my bananas in Aston, where my husband likes to get them, but he died two days ago,” she said, “I don’t know what to do without him.” Silence filled the store as her eyes filled with tears.

I wrapped my arms around her frail little body. “Everything is gonna be okay”, I whispered in her ear.

“Thank you for your love and kindness,” she said, “God bless you.”

She paid for her items and left. I paid for the coffee. The cashier gave me a nod. The old woman stopped me in the parking lot.

“Thanks again. Love is what is most important in this life, not money. You remember that”, she said.

 “I will,” I responded.

Her blue eyes peered into mine. The sun pushed the gray clouds aside as it beamed from behind her, landed on my face, and casted a shadow on the parking lot behind me. She smiled.

“I’ll be getting rid of a lot of things. I have a television I’ll never use, if you want it”, she said.

“Thanks, but please give it to someone who needs it,” I replied, “TV rots your brain.”

“Yes, it does,” she said, “But he loved his baseball.”

We embraced a goodbye hug.

While walking home I imagined the old woman in her youth, sitting with her husband on an afghan draped couch, watching the Phillies game while their children wrestle among a scattered pile of Lincoln logs and matchbox cars on a tired gold shag carpet. The wood paneled wall is riddled with splintered holes from where a curtain rod once hung. Her story is unknown and I’m still writing mine. Who knows where it will take me? From here I see my house in the distance and my wife’s coffee is black. I’m fine with that.