
ESSAY

John McNally 16 194 Days: When to Quit . . . When to Keep Going

2018 RIVER STYX MICROFICTION CONTEST WINNERS

Tamara L. Panici	81	Hangnail
Mark Wagenaar	83	The Sign
Leonora Desar	85	Daughter

ART

Kirsty Mitchell	Cover	A Forgotten Tale
Jennifer B. Thoreson	42	Testament

ILLUSTRATIONS

Tim Foley	17
Meredith Nelson	58, 65

CONTRIBUTOR BIOS 87

DAUGHTER

Leonora Desar

WE WENT IN TO GET SOME MAGAZINES and then my mom was like, do we need anything else, and I said, I don't think so. I got some gum. I slipped it in my purse. I did this because Anna Marten said it makes you feel bad, and I never felt bad, I felt nothing. I walked around with it and felt it melting on the bottom, next to all the lipstick. I stole those at the Five & Dime. They also made me feel nothing. I thought the gum would help. It sat there and talked to the lipstick and the lipstick said, I'm not interested.

We got in the car. I sat in the back and felt the summer heat and that made me feel nothing too. It was just heat, hot and sticky. That's what heat is. People always try to describe it, and then it just ends up sounding wrong, like my father, he's a writer, he's always saying that heat is incandescent, but what he really means is, it's hot. My mom looks at him. She doesn't get it either. And this is the problem between people, those who see heat as heat, and those who see it as something else.

Right now he's writing about the dog. Her sense of alienation and existential angst. He gets into it too, like a method actor. He gets down on all fours. He barks at the TV and sometimes it barks back. He watches *Lassie*. He's convinced *Lassie* didn't study method acting. That this is the problem with the movie.

My mother says, can you walk the dog, Jeff, and he says, sorry, I am too busy BEING the dog. She says, what about the human, meaning me. He says, sure thing, which really means, high school girls don't interest me.

He feeds the dog chocolates and Mom says, no, Jeff, the dog will die. But she doesn't die. She licks his hand. She hates my mom. And I think of me in seventh grade, the time he dressed me up as a boy and called me Samuel, and when he stopped I told Mom I would get legally emancipated unless she let me change my name.

I steal Dad's gum. There's some tobacco on it. I try to make it into a movie but it's not a movie. It's just gum.

I look at the couch and try to see it—divan. But it's not a divan, it's a fucking couch. There's some plastic on it. I roll his words around my tongue—*sofa-brie-velveting-ghosting-incandescent-light*.

I look in the mirror and try too. I think of the word I wish he'd use. I say it very softly.