



# Global Short Story Competition May 2013

Winner : Kate Daellenbach  
The Parcel

Highly Commended : Alexandra Apuzzo  
I met a Girl at 3am

# The Parcel

## Kate Daellenbach

I remember this girl, used to work here awhile back. She was young, but not feeling like young fits. Trying to be older, before she needed to be. But she was nice. She always treated the customers well, had a smile, a friendly greeting, even for this one crazy old fool that used to come in.

I wasn't really ever sure what it was about him. The first time I really noticed him was here, at this coffee shop. I'm sitting here, like regular, 7pm, drinking this rotten coffee, having a smoke. Then there's this commotion on the street. Security guys, they're walking fast one way and people are running another. I hear some guy shouting something in a foreign language. The guards are shouting back, "Hey! Mister! Calm down! Just put it down!"

There's more running, more shouting. Then I see this little old guy. 'Frantic' is written all over his face. He's yelling at people, trying to shoot them! But it's with a water bottle! Crazy. It's like he's playing some war game, but he looks pretty serious. The guards got hold of him eventually, though he certainly put up a fight for a little guy.



Then, I noticed one of the waitresses here. She's standing at the door, just watching. So, the next night, I sure notice when that crazy old guy comes in. He's short, stooped over, not very clean, has an overgrown moustache. He's wearing some old, dirty moss-green jacket, baggy black trousers, a dark green beret. His fingers are gloved, but the wool has worn through on the fingertips.

He shuffles up to the counter, eyes on the floor.

"Burger! Coffee!" He shouts his words like they're demands. He has an accent I can't place. Eastern Europe somewhere maybe.

The girl, the one I saw the night before, she gives him a big smile. "Hello! Burger and a coffee coming up."

The smile was a bit out of place with this guy. He looked off the wall really. A nutter. But every night, there he was with the same routine. Usually, that girl was there, always said hello, always smiled.

Her tag says she's "Mel." She wears the ugly brown uniform, but pinned back awkwardly to emphasise her waist. Fair bit of make-up. Hair done nicely. Earrings too sparkly for the job I think. She flirts a bit with the guys at the grocery store. Every now and then I see her on a break with other staff, sharing a smoke out back. She likes to work late, often one of the last to leave. I figured she was about 18, but then I overheard her one night. Getting one of the cooks to buy her some Tequila at the liquor store.



The cook, he comes back and says, “Y’know, my friends drink beer and it’s a lot cheaper. You and your University pals are a bit more sophisticated eh?”

She smiles and says “high school!”

She looked 18 or 19. But now I look at her, I can see she’s more like 15 or 16. Tequila. Crazy.

Most nights the old guy would come in, always alone, same clothes, same routine. The boys at the back would tease Mel. “Here comes the old guy.” “It’s your nutter friend.” “Off his rocker that one.” “Crazy fool.” She’d roll her eyes in agreement. Have a laugh, then come out front.

“Burger! Coffee!”

She’d smile, “Coming up!” or “Of course!”

Always the same. No other conversation. Mind you, he’d talk to himself, or shout at people on the street. Sometimes he’d write on small pieces of paper – very neat and tidy, but in some other language. Later the staff would clear the table, throw away the writing. She’d flirt with the grocery guys, work late, talk about heading out later to clubs, fix her make-up, sneak a smoke in every now and then, try to look older, cooler.

One night in he comes, the crazy guy, but he looks older somehow. This time he sits down as if he’s waiting for something. He’s clutching a parcel. Whatever it is it’s wrapped up in crinkled brown paper.



“Old guy’s there – crazy war-guy. Think he’s waiting for you!” the cooks tease her.

She laughs, rolls her eyes, then heads up to the counter.

He’s tentative now. He gets out of his seat slowly. He’s gripping the parcel at his side, shuffling to the counter. He unfolds the paper, and pulls something out. He puts it on the counter, looking down at it all the time. It’s a small doll, wearing an embroidered kind of folk dress I guess you’d call it. It’s not like a toy doll, more of a collector’s kind of thing, a treasure. Something you’d give to a young girl.

So he points his finger close to her face. “Dis” he says a bit too loudly, “for jou!” She backs off.

“Jou – for jou!” He says. “Dis!” He pushes the doll forward. She stares at him for a

second or two.

“For me?” she says, now pointing to herself.

“Jes. Jou!” He points at her again.

She smiles a different sad sort of smile. “Thank you very much” she says. “It’s beautiful. It’s very nice. Very kind.”

“Okay.” He smiles (... no teeth!). Then, he just left. Never saw him again.



She took that doll very carefully you know. She took it, and disappeared into the back. A few minutes later she comes out, with the doll carefully wrapped in a little bag, and heads out. Just like that, no smokes, no tequila, no flirting, no make-up checks. Just home I suppose, to her mum and dad.



# Highly Commended

## I met a Girl at 3am

### Alexandra Apuzzo

The bar was nearly empty, and my drink was nearly gone. I looked up, she was staring at me then came and sat down beside me.

She asked me, what was I doing here all by myself? A pretty little thing like me. I told her I could ask her the same fucking question.

“Well I would tell you,” She answered. “I don’t think I’m going to be here (anywhere) much longer. By myself, or otherwise. You see,” she began to whisper, “sometimes I think it would be better, if something were to happen to me, and I didn’t come back.”

I looked in her eyes for a sense of melancholy, or a loneliness etched, into the lines beneath her eyes. But all I saw was emptiness, and my face, expectant, reflected in her eyes. Her breath smelled of stale tobacco and old gin. The bags under her eyes were pulling the rest of her face down into a giant grimace.

I whispered back to her, “I think about killing myself all the time.”



She simply looked at me. "Have you ever tried it?"

"No. Have you?"

"Once. Here's the scar, right here." She showed me her wrist; there were two long scars across the length of it.

"Do you remember it?"

She shook her head. "Only this feeling of, like, release. Like it would all be over soon. Like I could finally breathe again. But then I woke up... it was all for nothing."

"But you didn't try it again?"

She shook her head again. "That feeling... That feeling in your stomach, when you wake up... you failed, you know? Everything in life you fail at and even killing yourself you can't do. It's miserable. Everyone looking at you like you're a fucking bomb that's going to go off... It's not worth it. Either stay alive or make sure you finish yourself off. That's my advice to you. Don't half ass it. The looks you get... I couldn't try again. Not with every one keeping tabs on me to make sure I don't go and try to fucking off myself- again."

"So what are you doing here?"

"What do you mean? I'm getting drunk. I'm unloading my shit onto a stranger. Then, I'm going to go home and go to sleep. When I wake up tomorrow, I might remember you. I might try to find you, to make sure you haven't killed yourself. But I don't have to go home yet. But what about you? You think about it all the time, why haven't you tried?"





I was silent for a minute, and I ordered another drink.

“When I was seven I saw my mom shoot herself in the head.”

She said nothing.

“I never told anybody that before.”

She still said nothing. “When I was thirteen I first thought about killing myself. I thought, maybe it would be better. My dad wouldn’t have to deal with me. I wouldn’t have to deal with me. There would be nothing, right? No more pain. No more, ‘I heard her mom went crazy. I heard she tried to kill her husband and her daughter.’ ‘I heard she ate the family dog before she shot herself.’ ‘I heard the maid shot her and said she did it to herself.’ ‘I don’t know, the whole fucking family is crazy.’ No more, just no more.”

“Why did your mom shoot herself?”

I shrugged. “She was fucking crazy. She left no note.”

“Are you mad at her?”

“No. She did what she had to do. She wasn’t happy, and as fucked up as she was, she had a right to that at least.”

“To unhappiness?”

“To whatever. To unhappiness, to death, to regret, whatever. She earned it. She lived her life then all she wanted to do was die. So... So be it, right? So die. Whatever.”



“So... You want to die too?”

I shook my head.

“Do you? Still want to die?” I asked her.

She didn't say anything.

“I'm not sure if I want to live. What's here for me? This? This dingy little bar at three in the morning? Is this what life is? Maybe I missed something. Some big piece of the spectrum that got handed out to everyone else but me. It's like I'm stuck in Kindergarten and the teacher let me keep sleeping after naptime was over but they gave all the other kids extra cookies. So now I'm sitting here on this fucking little matt, wishing I could just have some goddamn cookies like everybody else and the fucking teacher is telling me to be happy with what I have. And what I have is nothing. Zippo, zappo, zip. Nothing.”

“Do you believe in God?”

She laughed. “No. No. God, no.” She said. “If I did I wouldn't be sitting her talking to you now, would I?”

“Whys that?”

“Now I'm no expert, but aren't we committing about a hundred sins right now?”

“It depends which God we're talking about.”

“Ah, I'm talking about the real one. The one true God.”

“Which one is that?”



“Don’t you know? Every ones talking about him. He’s new. But he’s the real one there’s no doubt about it.” She started laughing hysterically. “I’m sorry,” she said, “I don’t mean to offend you or anything, it’s just... uh, ludicrous. Everyone’s so full of shit.”

“Amen.” I said and raised my drink.

“Do you think we have a right to die, if we want to? Don’t you think we should be allowed to off ourselves if we didn’t want to be here anymore? We should be able to say, when, right? Were allowed to say how we want our coffee. How the fuck we want our eggs, sunny side up or over easy? But not our death. That is always something someone else deals with. Either the doctors, or the robbers, or the drunken man driving the car in front of you, or the boyfriend that you just broke up with and didn’t know was a fucking psychopath so now he’s going to strangle you but your still not supposed to kill yourself? Out of all the fucking ways to die, why not do it ourselves?”

“Damn right we have that fucking right. It’s in the constitution, right? The right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, right? Or is it property? Whatever, same fucking thing. We have the right to decide what to do with our lives. And if that means ending them, damn right we have the right to do that.”

“Will you promise me one thing?”

“What?”



“When you wake up tomorrow, and you remember this conversation you had with that strange girl you met last night, just promise me that you won’t, okay? You won’t kill yourself. That you’ll do everything you can to make your life better. And you won’t end it. Because it’s not supposed to be over yet, okay? Don’t make the same mistake your mom did. She missed out on so much. Don’t make the same mistake I did. I would take it back, if I could.”

“Wait, what? What are you talking about?”

“I would take it back. Just remember that I would take it back, if I could.”

Her wrists started bleeding but her body started to fade. “I would take it back.” She kept saying but her voice kept getting farther and farther away. Her skin was increasingly more translucent and her voice was almost gone. Her eyes were still burning into mine until suddenly, they were gone. Just like that.

I looked around, my head going back and forth across the bar. Had I gone mad? Had I just seen a ghost? Did I hallucinate? The bar seemed deserted, except for the bartender, who seemed a little concerned.

“Miss?” He asked, “are you alright? Would you like another drink?”

“Uh, no, no. Did you see the girl? Sitting right here? Did you see her?”



He looked at me oddly. “Uh, no. I didn’t see any one. You’ve been sitting by yourself the whole night.”

I wanted to throw up. The alcohol was churning in my stomach and I clenched my eyes shut and held onto the bar.

“Uh, I’ll call you a cab, miss. You don’t look too good.”

“Thanks, thank you. I’m alright. I’ll go wait outside for the cab. Thanks. Need some fresh air.”

“Alright.” He said, worriedly, crossing the room over to the telephone.

As I opened the door and walked outside, a gush of wind blew over me. I could hear, in the wind, a whisper. A quiet desperate whisper, reaching beyond from somewhere I couldn’t see. It told me never to forget. It told me she would take it back. Take it all back, if she could.





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